FULTON COUNTY FAIR

AUG. 29-SEPT. 4, 2008

Reading, Writing– and Hurdling Pigs?

Never underestimate the educational value of the Fulton County Junior Fair

At Fayette School, students can't leave kindergarten without knowing how to tie their shoes.

So midway through this past school year, it came as a surprise to first grade teacher Lacy Stambaugh to learn that a little girl in her class didn't know how. The student, who always wore slip-on shoes, had attended a different kindergarten that didn't have the tie-your-shoe requirement.

For Lacy, the incident brought back memories of her days on the Fulton County Junior Fair Board, when she asked some new members of the group who didn't grow up on farms and/or who had never had animal projects at the fair to help "hurdle" hogs. Hurdling is using a portable board, gate or fence, which the British call a hurdle, to direct animals from their pens into loading chutes or lineups for the livestock shows.

"I said to them, 'Grab a hurdle and help with those pigs,'" she said. "They just looked at me like 'You want me to do what?' One asked, 'Do you want us to go in front of the pig or behind it?'"

For Lacy, who grew up on a hog farm, this was an eye-opener: she assumed everyone knew the finer points of hog hurdling.

"You want to say, 'Just go out and do it,' but you can't, because they don't know how. You have to go back to the beginning. You have to teach them."

This lesson has served her well during her first four years as a classroom teacher, as well as in her role, with husband Nick, as advisor of the Fayette Rough Riders 4-H Club.

She and the youngsters she works with in the club and classroom have also benefited from the communication, organization and mentoring skills she developed by teaching younger Junior Fair Board members.

Real-world skills

Jill Stechschulte, 4-H youth development educator at the Ohio State University Fulton County Extension Office, is not surprised by Lacy's experience.

In 13 years on the job, Jill has seen firsthand just how many real-world job skills kids can pick up by participating in the Junior Fair.

"Junior Fair projects teach kids to set goals, plan, use resources wisely and keep records," she explains. "They learn to fill out entry forms and applications and develop interview skills as they respond to judge's questions. It builds their self-esteem."

Joining the Junior Fair Board teaches youngsters even more.

"They learn self-motivation, teamwork, and thinking and decision-making skills," she says. "They learn to be good role models and mentor younger kids. They know they have to be dependable, show up on time, and do the job set before them."

Junior Fair Board members, who help run the livestock competitions, also learn podium etiquette and stress management skills that come in handy if young exhibitors and/or their parents are disappointed or angry about a judge's decision in the show ring.

The feedback Jill receives from Junior Fair Board "grads" indicates that they continue to benefit from what they learned.

"The big one I hear is that their leadership skills have helped them get into organizations," she said. "Some say they used to be really shy, but after Fair Board, they're now comfortable in interviews. And I had a local employer tell me that he's more likely to hire kids who have been involved in 4-H or FFA."

Lessons for the Future

Sarah Pratt, 17, daughter of Jim and Carolyn, rural Pettisville, is convinced what she's learned from the Junior Fair will help her in the future.

"Definitely!" says Sarah, a junior at Pettisville High School who has taken part in the Junior Fair since she was 8.

"Just knowing you can be in the ring (to show a project animal) you can think 'Wow! I've really done something. I'm glad I gave it a try."

Secretary and reporter for the Pettisville Ever-Ready 4-H Club, Sarah is serving for the first time on the Junior Fair Board, and expects to learn a lot more that will help her in the future.

"You have to have teamwork to work with others on the board," Sarah said. "You can observe others and learn from their skills. And you have to have an open mind.

"My older sister was on the Junior Fair Board. She really gained a lot of experience and connections. She learned valuable skills she'll continue to use (after she graduates from college) in her work area, which is special education."

What's the most valuable thing Sarah believes she is learning from her Junior Fair experience?

"That's a tough one," she said with a teenaged giggle before addressing the question with wisdom beyond her years. "I know that a lot of people talk about leadership, but I think to be able to be hands-on, you have to serve people. Even though you may be in your (4-H) club and helping just one person, it can affect a lot."

*Horseshoe Pitching Club

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rate county championships for men, women and juniors; seniors' tournament: and a doubles tournament.

"We've had several world champions pitch in our tournaments, (including) Paul Fought from Dayton and Stan Manker from southern Ohio," Jim offers.

The local talent isn't bad, either. During a mens tournament last year, Club president Olen Stutzman, a farmer who took up pitching just four years earlier, had a ringer percentage of 47.8 in one game and 54.8 another.

"Top pitchers– those in Class A– have ringer percentages that run between 40 and 55," Jim says.

"These are the Nicklauses and Palmers and Tigers of their sport."

Jim says that while a lot of things have changed since the fair board decided to add a horseshoe pitching tournament to their lineup in 1958, some things haven't.

"There's always been a real bond among pitchers," he said. "And it still takes the same things to succeed: desire, practice, and a positive attitude."

Persons interested in participating should consult the 2008 Fulton County Fair Book at www.fultoncountyfair.com, or pick up a copy at the Fair Box Office under the Grandstand.

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