

4-H celebrates centennial

By Emily Hannemann
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OZAUKEE COUNTY — When most people think of 4-H, they might not think of robotics, archery or photography. In fact, most probably assume 4-H is an agriculture organization whose members spend their time working exclusively on farms and with farm animals.

They would assume incorrectly.

This year marks the 100th year that Wisconsin has had a 4-H program. The Ozaukee County chapter of 4-H was founded in 1929 with the purpose of teaching youth through hands-on learning experiences, according to the Ozaukee County University of Wisconsin-Extension.

Today there are 12 community clubs in Ozaukee County, with more than 600 youth members and over 300 adult volunteers. There are 50,000 youth enrolled in 4-H throughout the state

of Wisconsin, making it the largest youth development group in the state.

While the 4-H program began with a definite focus on agriculture, with corn clubs and later, canning clubs, the 4-H of today has



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Members of area 4-H clubs recently presented a centennial plaque to the Ozaukee County Board. The members are, from right, Danny Cain, Calvin Brice, Lianna Brice, Rachel Gierach, Sarah Riemer and Josh Riemer.

evolved into an organization that provides much more, whether one is agriculturally minded or not.

"We like to dispel that myth that 4-H is for farm kids," said Kathy Butler, Ozaukee County 4-H and youth development educator.

Besides offering courses in robotics, archery and photography, Ozaukee 4-H members may also participate in the STEM program, a program allowing participants to explore the fields of science, technology, engineering and math.

Butler said the difference between 4-H and other youth development programs is that the entire family can attend club meetings together, but then work on projects tailored to each person's individual interests.

"It's not a one-size-fits-all program," she said.

Members choose to do a project in any of the 4-H programs — including, but not limited to, those listed above — then must display one of the items from one of

their projects at the county fair.

At its heart, 4-H is a youth leadership and volunteer organization with a focus on community service and learning beneficial life skills. And because it is part of the UW-Extension, it is wholly educational.

Butler said everything they do has an educational component to it, but without the school walls.

"Our classroom walls are non-existent," she said. "It's all hands-on learning."

4-H activities also span well beyond the dates of the fair; annual events include the 4-H Bowl-a-Thon, 4-H Dance, Communication Festival, Photography Contest, Volleyball and Softball Tournaments, and a Mini Golf Tournament. Also offered are trips across the country, and international trips through IFYE, the International Four-H Youth Exchange.

Longtime member and centennial committee member Sue Dowe said her years in the club have presented her with numerous oppor-

tunities and even taught her job interviewing skills.

"My own experience with 4-H was one of the best times of my life. Not only did I meet my husband, but I made lifelong friendships," she said.

To this day, she is comfortable speaking in front of people, thanks to her time with 4-H.

Dowe's 13-year-old daughter Rebecca has been involved since she was 5 and is now an ambassador and club president.

"Her confidence and leadership skills can be credited to her time in 4-H," Dowe said.

The centennial will be celebrated at this year's Ozaukee County Fair with 4-H Day on Saturday, Aug. 2. There will be a display of 4-H memorabilia in the Ozaukee Pavilion. All former 4-H members and leaders should plan on being part of the alumni photo, which will be taken at 4:30 p.m. at the pavilion. To register, go to <http://goo.gl/h5aEhY>.