

## Spirit of the West

### Homestead student to tour the West with rare Wisconsin educational 4-H opportunity

By Sarah Rennie

Special to the News Graphic

The splendor of Old Faithful tossing great streams of water straight to the sky. Jagged crags of rock and winding paths dispersed for miles across prairie grass and greenery of the Badlands. The breathtaking, white-capped mountain peaks and bear sightings at Grand Teton National Park. All span the landscape of U.S. history and are just as fascinating today as when first discovered.

Homestead High School freshman Devin Curran is about to come face-to-face with the grandeur of these national wonders when he heads west for an 11-day summer excursion as an Ozaukee County delegate for the 4-H American Spirit West Experience.

The 4-H American Spirit West Experience is an educational trip for young individuals to gain a better understanding of the country's natural beauty and preservation. From June 20 through June 30, the group will visit six national parks across the western side of the country and learn this history and upkeep of the vast natural wonders in the United States. The itinerary includes

stops at Badlands National Park in South Dakota and Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming, among others.

This trip is not one that is usually available for 4-H members in this part of Wisconsin; instead, those in the state often head east. But when Kathy Butler, the 4-H and youth development educator of the Ozaukee UW-Extension, called Curran to notify him of a last-minute spot that opened one Sunday evening, Curran immediately expressed interest. The only snag was a quick turnaround of cover letter, résumé and essay by Tuesday.

Curran wasted no time making certain he had everything in order. He came home after school that Monday and cranked out the information. Wednesday was a phone interview, and on Friday, he was asked to join the trip.

A devout nature enthusiast, Curran is eager to add to his insight of the world around him. He lives on the Milwaukee River and experiences the soothing lull of nature from his back door, but to see the magnificence of mountains and lush vegetation up close will be something altogether life changing.

“Since I was little, I’ve been exploring nature,” he said. “Living here has opened me to be informed about it. Nature is very important.”

Upon return, Curran will present his experience to the Lindenwood 4-H

club in Mequon to inform its members of the importance of natural preservation and encourage them to learn more and advocate for environmental conservatism to keep the nation's natural beauty intact. He's been involved in the club for 10 years, and this year, he's already participated in activities such as tying, rock climbing, small engines and fishing.

4-H is an informal, educational youth organization and part of the UW-Extension youth program that invites participants in year-round project work, local community service and activities that weave together valuable life skills.

Curran's quick to thank the Ozaukee County 4-H Leaders Association for providing the plethora of opportunities through hands-on learning experiences. Through this trip, he will help ensure future generations are able to enjoy the same beauty and natural appreciation he's been brought up with.

The American Spirit West experience will only enhance his love for nature and become the highlight of his summer.

Said Curran, “It's going to be an unbelievable experience.”



Devin Curran has grown up with an appreciation of nature.

Photo by Leo & Jenny Photography