



100 YEARS OF 4-H

By Sally Smid

4-H Ontario recently celebrated 100 years of providing what is recognized as one of the foremost leadership programs for youth. Leeds 4-H marked that milestone locally and noted the remarkable successes of a program that in many ways remains as popular today as it was in its earlier years. A devoted committee of 4-H volunteers and supporters have greatly contributed to that success. The anniversary was recognized at the Lombardy fairgrounds last September with a cake, displays and time of reminiscing.

In the early years membership to 4-H was free as there was government funding for support, but there is now a fee. Much more has changed over the years, especially due to developments in farm technology, but the goals are still quite the same. Head, Heart, Hands and Health are the four H's in 4-H, and they are the four values members focus on through interactive and engaging programs. It was broken down further to read Head, involved managing and thinking; Heart, relating and caring; Hands, giving and working; and Health, being and living.

The program is noted for developing young leaders and includes a variety of interests, life skills and experiences. Many

may equate 4-H with "learning to lead a calf", but certainly it goes much beyond that. Leeds 4-H has provided clubs such as Beef, Sheep, Goat, Ploughing, Dairy, Rabbit Hopping, Books, Quilting, Curling, Maple Syrup, Bread Baking, Hiking, Geocaching and even Etiquette. Many members have also attended provincial 4-H camps and have been part of exchange programs.

Long time volunteer Lammie Schapelhouman of Athens began to lead clubs when things like Home Economics were no longer included in school curriculum. It was a chance to learn about cooking, sewing, knitting and many other useful and practical skills. Boys were also involved in such clubs. It is certainly a wonderful alternative in many ways to TV or computer games. The program strives to carry out the motto, "Learning by Doing". There is even the Cloverbuds for kids 6-8 who are not old enough for the standard 4-H Clubs.

Many participants make use of animals from local farms to learn about caring for and showing a calf, sheep or goat. Burnbrae Farms have helped to host a Beef Club for many years, which makes it possible for youth from the city also to be involved. Members can compete locally and often go on to regional competitions as well.

Brenda Dunster has served as a 4-H leader for over 20 years. She has found the program very rewarding and comments, "It is wonderful to see the light in a young participant's eyes when they are able to accomplish something through learning by doing!" She received the Syngenta 4-H Ontario Arbor Award last year, which is one of 4-H Ontario's most distinguished volunteer awards. Brenda continues to volunteer and recently led a tour to visit more unusual livestock such as water buffalo.

Neil Carkner is currently the Leeds 4-H Association Representative/County Coordinator and President and remembers his early days in 4-H. "It is a great way to learn responsibility that makes a difference for life," he related. Neil is one of the many dedicated volunteers who teaches about handling livestock, ploughing and much more. Young participants often comment that it is a great way to make life long friends, as well as learn many new skills. Members assist and encourage each other which results in many valuable relationships and rewarding connections.

Often whole families are involved together in 4-H, which can provide very unifying and rewarding experiences that don't often happen in this busy age. The Carkner family



Clockwise: 9 Year old Annie Roth operates a tractor for the first time with coaching from 4-H leader Neil Carkner; Lombardy 4-H Competition - Cassey Roth prepares her calf for competition as part of the 100th 4-H celebrations in Lombardy; 4-H Bread Baking Club participants display their completed breads.

has been involved in 4-H together for many years. Shannon has been a leader and organizer. Her daughter, Brittany, has been named Queen of the Furrow for several terms, and her sister Allie, now the reigning Princess of the Furrow. Such glamorous titles do not mean that these girls do not know how to work hard, get dirty or drive a tractor with great skill. The competition also includes appearance, deportment, an interview, and a speech to the judges, as well as knowing how to plough an accurate furrow. Brother Matthew Carkner even saved his money to buy his own tractor. Brittany is currently in pre-veterinarian

studies and her siblings have interest in continuing agricultural pursuits in some way. However, no matter what a future pursuit might be, those involved are convinced that 4-H develops skills and character that contribute to further successes in life.

Participants learn the importance of hard work and perseverance as they spend many hours leading and grooming their entries for local fair competitions. One parent commented, "My daughter gained a lot of confidence and a sense of accomplishment in 4-H!" Joyce Vanderkoet, who has been involved with 4-H most of her life related, "I

find that 4-H really boosts self esteem and there doesn't seem to be as much peer pressure. It is also a way to improve public speaking and find friends with similar interests." There are still many dedicated 4-H leaders and while there are fewer farm kids, membership is not limited to rural participants. Clubs are changing to meet the needs of nonfarming members.

So it seems that the 4-H anniversary was a time to celebrate 100 years of accomplishments, as well as be given a chance to look ahead to many more successful and exciting years to come! [LH](#)