

4-H'ers saddle up for philanthropy

By Jennifer Nance, Owasso, Okla.



The Pawnee Bill Buffalo Ranch and Museum, located west of Pawnee, Okla., serves as one of the last landmarks of the Old West. (Photo by Jennifer Nance)

Nearly a century ago, a man dubbed "Pawnee Bill" began a Wild West show. The show became a rowdy, wrangling rodeo full of trick riders, gunfights and roping between the cowboys and Indians. Now known as the Pawnee Bill Memorial Rodeo and Cattle Drive, the event and area 4-H'ers have joined forces for a charitable cause: St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

At first glance, it seems the Oklahoma 4-H Youth Development Program, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and a cattle drive have nothing in common. However, Oklahoma 4-H members pride themselves on strengthening families and communities. These three groups came together to accomplish that goal last August.

For years, Oklahoma 4-H has taught youth and young adults the importance of responsibility, including community service and leadership development. The 4-H program influences the lives of its members and allows them to help others.

"I try to involve the 4-H'ers in as

much as I can," said Jeremiah Butler, Pawnee County Cooperative Extension agriculture/4-H educator. "It broadens their horizons."

Honoring the yesterdays

The town of Pawnee is loyal to its western legacy. Honoring the past, Pawnee County hosts an annual Pawnee Bill Memorial Rodeo and Cattle Drive.

"The cattle drive has given Pawnee a place on the map," Butler said. "It has become one of the biggest cattle drives in the state."

The rodeo marked its 21st anniversary in 2006. The cattle drive celebrated its 11th anniversary.

"In 2007, the Pawnee Bill celebration will be bigger and better than ever before," Butler said.

"It will be the centennial commemoration of the Pawnee Bill Wild West Show," he said.

Striving for the future

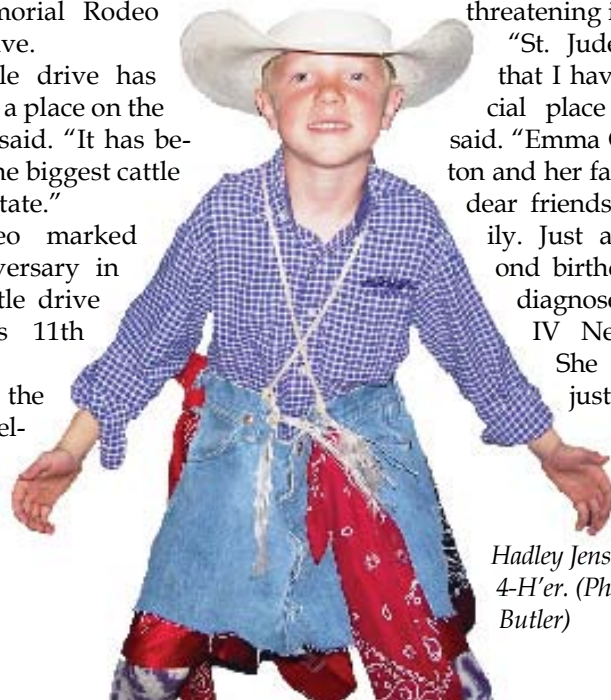
With the 2006 rodeo and cattle drive approaching, Pawnee County 4-H'ers "saddled up" for a philanthropic cause. They chose to donate the proceeds from the rodeo and cattle drive to St. Jude, a pediatric treatment and research center in Memphis, Tenn.

St. Jude is dedicated to treating children with cancer and other life-altering diseases. Families without insurance who come to the hospital for treatment are never asked to pay for anything. According to St. Jude, it is not just a place to treat the sick; families are educated about problems and given the best opportunity to overcome them. It is a learning environment where the children can meet others from all across the world.

Helping today

Amy Bailey, a 2006 graduate of the agricultural communications program at Oklahoma State University, said she knows first-hand the advantages of such an outstanding facility. She grew up three hours from St. Jude. Bailey said she learned how important the treatment center is when a close friend was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness.

"St. Jude is a cause that I have a very special place for," Bailey said. "Emma Grace Hampton and her family are very dear friends of my family. Just after her second birthday, she was diagnosed with Stage IV Neuroblastoma. She passed away just months prior to her fifth birthday.



Hadley Jensen, Pawnee County 4-H'er. (Photo by Jeremiah Butler)



Morgan Vance, the top fundraiser, herds cattle during the drive. (Photos above and below by Jeremiah Butler)

"St. Jude carried her family for two years," Bailey said. "Without them, I'm not sure what they would have done."

Reaching for tomorrow

According to St. Jude, the hospital is dedicated to finding cures and helping children win their battles against life-threatening diseases. This facility tackles the toughest cases in the world. It is one of today's top research facilities and uses the latest technology to fight debilitating diseases.

St. Jude is funded primarily through gifts and donations of others. Without donations, like those from

the Pawnee County 4-H, St. Jude would not have become the third-largest health care charity, according to St. Jude.

"A good friend's little sister was sick, and St. Jude took care of her and her family," Butler said. "That is why I thought the rodeo and cattle drive would be a perfect opportunity to raise money and give back to a place that has given so many so much."

Lending a hand

Twenty-three members of the Pawnee County 4-H program worked to raise funds for St. Jude.

Morgan Vance earned top fundraiser honors and received a buckle and a saddle donated by Alburty Plumbing and Security Bank.

Natalie Jenson received a saddle blanket and bridle for second, and Jaiden Alley earned third, getting a new saddle blanket. Those awards were donated by Teresa Smith and Jeremiah Butler.

"It was such a good cause," Vance said. "I didn't do it for the prizes; I did it to help kids all around the world."

Out of the shoot and off the trailer, the festivities began with the cattle drive and ended at the rodeo.

"Man, was it fun," Vance said. "It was hot, but it was fun!"

Passion in the plan

On Aug. 6, the group of 4-H'ers and volunteers drove cattle 14 miles in a sweltering 108 degree heat from the 101 Ranch in Marland, Okla., to Red Rock, Okla.

"It was an honor to support an organization that has supported so many families in crisis," Bailey said. "During the cattle drive, I rode in memory of Emma Grace."

Following the cattle drive, there were three nights of rodeo performance, fundraising and a parade.

Serving those in need

Each evening, the Pawnee Bill Memorial Rodeo came to life as the buzz of the speaker rang over the quieted crowd. A gentle voice spoke a poignant cowboy prayer that echoed throughout the arena. Pawnee 4-H members participated in the grand entry of the rodeo during the Thursday, Friday and Saturday evening performances, and they set up a booth and distributed yardsticks to continue their fundraising efforts.

"I am amazed at how hard these 4-H'ers worked to raise money for such a wonderful cause," Butler said.

Whether it was ropin', ridin', or just sittin' horseback, the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital received a \$3,000 check after the festivities, and the Pawnee County 4-H members lent a helping hand — cowboy style! ☺

