

Happy birthday, Clover!

Oklahoma 4-H celebrates 100 years of 'making the best better'

Honoring. Celebrating. Envisioning. Oklahoma 4-H turns 100 this year and plans a year-long celebration. The party started at the 2008 Oklahoma 4-H Roundup and will continue through 2009.

"As Oklahoma 4-H celebrates 100 years of service to the state, extension educators, 4-H members, volunteers and alumni are making preparations for celebrations across the state," said Jessica Stewart, Oklahoma 4-H Youth Development program marketing coordinator and centennial celebration chairwoman.

Oklahoma 4-H originated in 1909 as a youth organization to promote and enhance agricultural and home economic practices. Starting with 50 corn club members in Tishomingo, Okla., today more than 162,000 Oklahomans are involved in 4-H. Its centennial mission is to honor the past, celebrate the present and envision the future.

Honoring

To honor the Oklahomans who have been part of 4-H, the organization created a centennial division for the county and state fairs, allowing 4-H alumni to exhibit their items again.

"Back when these alumni were in 4-H and doing their project work, it was an exciting moment for them," Stewart said. "They won trips to go out of state and go across the country to national conferences, and those were the

highlights of their lives. So, we wanted to give them an opportunity to showcase how it affected their lives."

Charles Cox, assistant director and program leader of 4-H Youth Development for the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, said another goal of the Oklahoma 4-H centennial celebration is for 4-H members to learn about preserving and restoring their 4-H history.

"All kinds of histories are coming out of the treasure chest in the attic or top of the closet," Cox said. "The most exciting part is seeing other people getting excited about their history, reliving some of the experiences and friendships they made."

The centennial division will be available for the 2009 fairs with classes for current 4-H'ers and 4-H alumni.

"Within the youth classes, 4-H'ers can exhibit antiques, photography, fabric and fashion, quilts, various posters and displays, a lot of then and now," Stewart said. "What we really want them to do is to go back, research their 4-H heritage, and understand what 4-H used to be versus today."

In the alumni division, the classes include antiques and collectibles, ribbons, medals or buttons they may have won in 4-H — basically any kind of 4-H collectible.

Stewart said the Oklahoma State Fair had 167 centennial division entries, including an original project work class for dresses, clothing and hand-knitted items. Other alumni classes were photography, original 4-H record books and personal scrapbooks.

"This is a great way to see what people have collected during their 4-H career," Stewart said. "It is neat to look at what members were doing then and think about what they do now."

Stewart said the projects showed what was important to 4-H'ers and how 4-H influenced their lives.

"Some of the poster displays in the alumni division had things they saved from every trip," Stewart said. "They had bars of soap they had from the hotel that they stayed in, and they kept the sugar packets from the breakfasts and lunches that they had."

Celebrating

Along with honoring the past, the Oklahoma 4-H Youth Development program is celebrating the present through a statewide homecoming event. This event tentatively is planned for November 2009. Counties and districts also are encouraged to celebrate locally.

"We are encouraging every county in the state to have some kind of celebration," Cox said. "It will be a good event



to identify some new partners, alumni and significant donors to the 4-H program and the scholarship program.”

Additionally, Oklahoma 4-H is creating a centennial commemorative garden at the Oklahoma Botanical Garden in Stillwater. 4-H members began work in October 2008 on landscaping designs, and they plan to help plant flowers in the garden in the spring.

“4-H’ers have the opportunity to work with a landscape designer while also creating a garden celebrating 4-H,” Stewart said.

The most exciting part is seeing other people getting excited.

*Charles Cox
Oklahoma 4-H assistant director*

Envisioning

The centennial celebration paves the way for future 4-H’ers to learn about their organization through an Oklahoma 4-H centennial road trip.

“This is an activity where we are encouraging youth and adults to plan road trips around the state,” Cox said. “We are encouraging every county to identify significant locations that may have something to do with the history of 4-H.”

Matthew Taylor, the state 4-H chairman, said this is a good activity for Oklahoma 4-H members to learn about budgeting, time management and contacting people to visit these locations.

“Since this is our centennial, this is a way to find out a little bit more about Oklahoma 4-H in general,” Taylor said. “They are learning about how much time it will take to get to their destination and budgeting their money.”

Oklahoma 4-H plans to establish a geo cache — like a treasure chest — at each county’s historical 4-H location.

Cox said each geo cache would allow 4-H’ers to go on a scavenger hunt. Those who find the cache cannot remove anything, but can add something to it.

“The Oklahoma 4-H program depends entirely upon its youth members, volunteers, extension educators and supporters,” Stewart said. “As we honor the past and those who made Oklahoma 4-H what it is today, we are continually envisioning the future and our next century of success.” • *By Lindsey Pritchard, McLoud, Okla.*

To learn more about Oklahoma 4-H’s centennial celebration activities, history and ways to get involved, please visit <http://celebrateok4h.okstate.edu>.

Aubrey Snider (left), Lillie Snider, Susan Weckler and Karen Weckler, members of Payne County 4-H, decide which plants to use in designing the Oklahoma 4-H centennial garden.

