

# Extension

## Making a Difference

### 4-H Reaches New Audiences

The families in this west side neighborhood have been touched by the 4-H program through having the Wisconsin Valley Fair in the heart of their location. They have watched cattle and cakes...flowers and food, all be hauled past their homes to be exhibited by 4-H'ers from across the county. But very few of those kids originated in the homes around Marathon Park. That is until now!



Summer clubs prepare Fair items.

Through summer club programs at Lincoln and G.D. Jones Elementary Schools, as well as an after-school club at John Muir Middle School, 4-H has offered the neighborhood new opportunities for learning about nutrition, the arts, rocketry, and a wide variety of other traditional 4-H projects.

The clubs are led by Jean Berger and Linda Bentz, Marathon County's 4-H Youth Development professionals, as well as 4-H Interns Brooke Fricke and Jenny Damrow, with

assistance from Josh Yang, a youth educator hired through the CYFAR funding.

#### What we're doing

4-H first implemented the idea of summer clubs after receiving additional funding from United Way in the summer of 2000. The program has grown from humble beginnings to serving 15 youth at Lincoln Elementary, 43 youth at G.D. Jones, and 12 teens at John Muir on a weekly basis in 2003.

The elementary school clubs meet throughout the summer for two hours, twice a week at each site. These youth, in grades three through five, have an opportunity to experience a "real" 4-H club. They learn the 4-H Pledge; work on 4-H projects developed around a central theme; take on leadership roles within the group; work together to provide service to their community; and exhibit at the fair along with 1000 other youth from clubs across Marathon County.

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At John Muir, a teen club was developed after-school with seventh grade youth. The group learned about 4-H; studied a variety of 4-H projects, completed items to be shown at the fair, and were encouraged to share what they had learned with other youth in their school and in the 4-H clubs at the elementary schools. Several of the youth volunteered as leaders for the summer clubs, providing assistance with projects and sharing what they had learned as after school members with them. This mentor model helped the older youth gain experience and confidence in their leadership abilities. It also encouraged the members of the younger group to continue their 4-H experiences when they moved up to middle school.

## The difference we're making

Members of these west side clubs reflect the demographics of the neighborhood. Approximately half of the youth served are from the Southeast Asian community. These youth are typically low income. All are experiencing 4-H for the first time! They are truly from the families that UW-Extension has traditionally had difficulty reaching.

The youth developed new skills, but more importantly they shared what they learned with others. These qualities will help to instill a desire to be active members of their schools today, and in their communities in the future.

The program is valued by the participants and their families. While the program supplies were

supplied through grant funding, transportation was not. The youth who attended summer clubs walked and biked to the school buildings throughout the summer. Those who attended the middle school program walked home, long after the school busses had transported others after school. Members of all ages were seen sharing their accomplishments with friends and family as they proudly pointed out their projects at the Wisconsin Valley Fair.

## Project Partners

This expanded version of 4-H is funded through the Marathon County 4-H Leaders' Federation with funds from United Way of Marathon County and U.S. Department of Agriculture CYFAR (Children, Youth and Families At Risk) grant funds. They have designated dollars earned through traditional 4-H fundraising to the project as well. With these "leveraged" funds, the organization can hire quality staff and purchase the supplies needed for the project work. Wausau School District has been a willing partner, providing meeting space and support from principals, teachers and school counselors.

## Future Directions

The middle school club is expanding to meet the needs of more youth at John Muir. Kids in all three grades have been invited



to join the program. Youth who have graduated from the elementary program have expressed an interest in participating in the after school club throughout the year, and are anticipating the opportunity of going back to their "old" elementary school to mentor young children.

This new model has helped to make 4-H recognized as a positive and fun opportunity among the youth of the west-side neighborhoods. Youth have gained skills in leadership and academics, and a base of trained volunteers has been promised for the future...a future that will surely include 4-H!

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