From livestock to robotics, how 4-H opportunities evolved to meet the needs of 21st century youth

AMANDA THIEN
For the News Leader

The 4-H program in Nassau County began around 1917 and the method of program delivery was entirely through the school system. The county agent taught farming to the boys, and the home economics agent taught the girls subjects related to the home. In 1945, while Gordon Ellis was agent, he focused on teaching primarily dairy and forestry projects.

The 4-H boys' club had a tree farm with more than 50 diverse tree species planted. They also had a Christmas tree farm they used as an annual fundraiser.

When Judson Fulmer took over as county agent in 1969, 4-H volunteers began playing a critical role in delivering programs to youth, not only in the school system but also during after school hours. At this time the boys and girls began working together “To make the best better.”

Although farming topics are still popular for youth enrolled in 4-H today, members engage in a variety of subject matter including but not limited to: Communication and expressive arts, citizenship, leadership, photography and so much more.

Nassau County 4-H currently offers 18 clubs, with some focusing specifically on specific projects such as robotics, marine science and others offering youth a variety of project opportunities as well as the chance to learn leadership skills and complete community service projects. 4-H is offered to youth ages 5-18 and approximately 350 youth are currently enrolled in the Nassau County 4-H Youth Development Program. 4-H agents and volunteers still offer school enrichment opportunities such as Tropicana Public Speaking, Embryology, Agriculture Extravaganza and these programs reach approximately 4,000 students annually.

Nassau County 4-H members have earned numerous accolades throughout the years such as trips to National Conference and Congress, as well as National Competitions for Forest Ecology, Poultry Judging and other areas. This time of year Nassau County youth anxiously await their week-long opportunity to camp at Cherry Lake, which has not changed much through the years.

4-H communicates now via electronic newsletters and by using social media.

Numerous 4-H alumni have children who have graduated from or are currently growing up in the county program, and the stories of life skills gained and funny memories experienced constantly keep current extension agents entertained.

If you would like to share your skills as a 4-H volunteer or enroll your child/children in the best youth development program in Nassau County, call toll free 1-855-212-1244 or look online for opportunities at Nassau.ifi.afl.edu.

Amanda Thien is 4-H Youth Development Agent for Nassau County. This is the second in a series celebrating the 100th anniversary of the county extension agent.

4-H through the years. Nassau County Bicentennial parade, 1976. The Nassau County 4-H Council participated with a float. The 4-H’er holding the American flag is Council President Ralph Hurst, Jr. Dixie Fulmer, council vice president, is holding the 4-H flag. Photo Courtesy Ralph Hurst, Jr. Nassau 4-H Agent Amanda Thien conducts an after-school session on embryology for students at Callahan Middle School.