Montana 4-H Congress: 100 Years of Building Leaders

The Teton County 4-H delegation celebrated the 100-year anniversary of Montana 4-H at Congress, July 10-13. Teton County sent delegates in four contest areas: livestock evaluation, quilting, fashion revue and demonstration. When awards were given on Thursday night, Teton County participants placed first in every event entered.

Skyler Anderson, Chottie Crary, Luke Murnane and Jayelyn Ruckman competed as a team in livestock evaluation. The team placed first in the state. Ruckman placed second overall for individual scores in livestock evaluation out of a field of 65 participants. Crary placed 16th and Cody Ulsh, who served as an alternate to the livestock evaluation team, placed 21st. The team has qualified to compete at the Western National Roundup in Denver on Jan. 9-13, 2013.

Ali Willekes and Anne Rice both represented Teton County in the quilt contest. Participants constructed a quilt and were judged on design, color, sewing/quilting quality and presentation to the judges. Willekes placed first in the quilt contest. It was Willekes’ first trip to Congress and her first-place win gives her the opportunity to represent Montana at National 4-H Congress in Atlanta, Ga., in November.

Katie Townsend competed in the fashion revue contest. Models are judged on their sewing ability, poise, leadership, contributions to others and more. Participants in fashion revue modeled on stage after the banquet Thursday night in front of 450 other 4-H Congress delegates. Townsend was selected as the first-place contestant, receiving a perfect score, and is eligible to represent Montana at National 4-H Congress in Atlanta.

Abigail Konen participated in the 4-H demonstration category. She presented, “Second Hand Paper” on making recycled paper in the competition and was called back for finals along with seven other contestants. Konen placed first out of a slate of 40 demonstrators at State 4-H Congress and earned the opportunity to represent Montana at National 4-H Congress.

Extension Agent Jane Wotley noted, “Teton County 4-H members have been very successful over the years at State 4-H Congress, but I cannot recall having so many first-place winners. It was thrilling to see the 4-H members succeed.”

Out of a delegation of nine members, seven were on stage receiving first-place medals and five of the members were first-time attendees at Congress. Lena Heuscher, a Teton County 4-H alumna, was on stage during the awards ceremony to receive a scholarship for her studies at MSU-Bozeman.

In addition to competitions, 4-H members attending Congress took part in a variety of educational events, activities and workshops. 4-H members attending the 82nd annual 4-H Congress attended the premiere of the Montana 4-H documentary developed by Montana PBS.

The program followed six Montana 4-H families for a year of 4-H education and adventures. Several Teton County 4-H members were featured in the film. The documentary captured the essence of the Montana 4-H program.

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Teton County 4-H Members and MSU Extension agents pose for a photo before the awards banquet at 4-H Congress. Seven of the 4-H members will represent Montana at National 4-H events.
High blood pressure and high cholesterol often go undetected because they may not produce noticeable symptoms until a major medical event happens. High blood pressure can lead to stroke and cardiovascular disease. When a person has too much cholesterol in the blood, it builds up on the walls of arteries, which can cause a slower blood flow to the heart and, in some cases, the brain. When the blood supply to a portion of the heart is cut off, the result is a heart attack. When blood supply is cut off to the brain, it is called a stroke. Strokes and heart attacks are serious, life-threatening events. Blood pressure and cholesterol levels can both be influenced by diet and exercise choices, as well as medications.

MSU Teton County Extension partnered with the Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS) to reach rural audiences with education to save lives and reduce long-term medical expenses. Throughout the year, Extension Agent Jane Wolery provided free blood pressure screenings at community events, Extension classes, civic groups, churches and more.

Wolery offered a number of classes aimed at reducing salt and cholesterol in the diet and improving the well-being of participants. Press releases, radio spots and direct mail campaigns were all used to get the message out to rural audiences to encourage blood pressure and cholesterol monitoring.

A number of county residents who had high blood pressure ratings were referred to their health care providers. One participant who had high blood pressure readings at a screening, followed up with a health care provider and contacted the MSU Teton County Extension Office to say, “Thanks for checking my blood pressure. I didn’t think I had high blood pressure, but, because of your program, I was able to take corrective steps now. I wonder what might have happened if I hadn’t been screened. I feel so much better.”

An Ounce of Prevention Costs Much Less . . .

In 2011 and 2012, Teton Medical Center coordinated a Diabetes and Cardiac Disease Prevention Program. As part of the education and lifestyle change program, Extension Agent Jane Wolery taught several lessons including: Think Your Drink — Reducing Consumption of Embedded Sugars, Adding Whole Grains to Your Plate, Recipe Redo — Altering Recipes for Health, Ways to Reduce Fat, Cues for Eating and Exercising, and the Impact of Our Social Environment on Our Health.

In 2011, 46 people registered. Thirty-eight people completed the course. Nearing the conclusion of the program, most participants lost weight, lowered their blood sugar, lowered their blood pressure and reduced their cholesterol levels. Participants in the program lost more than 745 pounds through October with an average loss at 16.6 pounds.

Participants also boosted their exercise, in some cases from zero minutes a week to 150 minutes a week with the average exercise activities hitting 246 minutes a week. Several participants were able to walk or jog a three-mile fun run near the completion of the program. Participants also learned how to watch portions, avoid high fat foods and make healthy choices when eating out or dining at home. Additionally, more than 70 people took part in a walking fitness class from nationally known walking and fitness expert, Robert Sweetgall.

The 2012 program began in January and to date 28 participants enrolled, with 20 completing the course. A total weight loss of 497 pounds was reported with an average weight loss of 9.6 lbs. Physical activity averaged 178 minutes per week.

Participants who used a variety of self-monitoring tools tended to do better, whether tracking total fat intake in grams or tracking physical activity in minutes. Extension enthusiastically partnered with TMC to provide impactful education that improves the health outlook for citizens in Teton County.
Munch Code — Changing for Good

Through MSU Teton County Extension, residents had an exciting opportunity to work with Dr. Miriam Nelson from Tufts University. Dr. Nelson is the author of numerous books and the StrongWomen™ program for strength training.

Dr. Nelson and her team of experts arrived in Choteau in the fall of 2011 to establish a Change Club — a group of individuals willing to assess their community and look for realistic improvements that can be made for the health benefit of residents.

Extension Agent Jane Wolery said, “The Change Club is an example of community development in the area of wellness.” The Choteau Change Club worked with Dr. Nelson over the course of three days, before she continued on her national Strong Women Across America tour.

The Change Club selected as its goal or “noble purpose” to positively shift the food culture in Choteau, Montana, by improving food offered at public and community gatherings. Dr. Nelson insists that a grassroots effort, like the one being undertaken by the Change Club, is what will be necessary to fight the growing obesity epidemic in our nation.

Positive cultural changes need leadership in order to survive. The Change Club has worked to develop a Munch Code booklet and web resource for concessionaires in the Teton County area. MSU Extension is currently working with student council leadership at the Choteau Schools to improve concession offerings at school sporting events.

The focus has been on the Choteau community for change, based on parameters set forth by Tufts University. However, once positive changes have been influenced in this community, the hope is to branch out into other locations in Montana. The Munch Code can be viewed at https://www.msuextension.org/teton/images/MunchCode.pdf

Some small steps in the right direction have included:

- **Chateau Library Story Hour**
  Added a variety of healthful foods as part of the reading program, including corn-on-the-cob and mangoes. These options replaced sugary treats.

- **Methodist Church Kids Club**
  Included purposeful activity/exercise and healthy foods for students in the afterschool program on Wednesdays.

- **Ranch Rodeo Concessions**
  Added apples and iced tea to their offerings and sold out.

- **Threshing Bee Concessions**
  Added string cheese, Colby cheese, almonds and fruit to their offerings.

- **4-H Fall Ambassador Training Statewide Conference**
  Provided information for planning committee on need to include healthy options and reduce junk food, and offered string cheese and almonds.

- **MSU Extension and Teton County Weed Department**
  Offered fruit and jerky and other healthful items for breaks at meetings, instead of doughnuts.

- **Choteau Junior Class Volleyball concessions**
  Offered yogurt, fruit, cheese and nuts.

- **4-H Fun Days**
  Provided healthier options for snacks including whole-wheat sandwiches, carrots, apples, bananas, hard-cooked eggs and whole-wheat tortillas.

- **Old Agency 4-H Holiday Party**
  Served black bean brownies, hummus, roasted garbanzo beans, vegetable tray, apples, fruit bowl and grapes.

- **Pre-school Christmas Program at Trinity Lutheran Church**
  Provided vegetable, cheese and meat trays, in addition to the traditional cookies.

- **Fireworks Fundraiser**
  Revised entire menu for nutritious offerings including whole-wheat buns, fruits and vegetables instead of chips, portion-controlled fruit/vegetable-based desserts (pumpkin, apple and zucchini bars) and water instead of sugar beverages.

- **Teton County Fair Concessions**
  Added fruit and vegetable trays, served with yogurt or ranch dressing for dipping. Offered chips and soda pop in the smallest sizes available to reduce empty caloric intake and reduced candy options.

A variety of other small, but significant, changes have been made. For a complete listing, email jwolery@montana.edu. Each member of the Change Club is impacting his/her social circles, work and volunteer activities for positive change.
4-H has long had a tradition of involving multiple generations in education. From the historic early days of 4-H, the goal was to reach families with the latest research-based methods available in agriculture and food production.

The technique used a century ago was to establish youth clubs where new methods were taught. The youth then shared new methods with their parents and grandparents. Today, the tradition of education through the 4-H program continues with intergenerational learning; however, there have been adaptations along the way for current needs and lifestyles.

Through the Teton County 4-H program, we strive to connect skilled individuals with youth who have the desire to learn certain skills. In 2012, the MSU Teton County Extension Office coordinated more than twenty Clover Classes and three 4-H Fun Days offering project skills for 4-H members (ages 8-18) and Cloverbuds (ages 5-8). Classes scheduled ranged from beef cattle nutrition and artisan bread making to woodworking and sports fishing. "We wanted classes in a variety of subject areas that correspond with the 4-H projects that members take," said Jane Wolery, Extension agent.

The 4-H year runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30. Each year 4-H members select from more than 50 project areas listed in the Clover Selection Guide and receive books and support materials for those projects. In addition to project books, youth often need a nudge in the right direction.

Parents sometimes become the default project leaders, but we realize that some youth education is more productive when another adult becomes a coach, mentor and teacher. "I learned many of my sewing skills from my mother," recalls Wolery, 4-H alumna and current Extension agent in Teton County. "But, sometimes it was much easier for both of us when I worked with my 4-H sewing leader, Louise Seuser." Wolery added that working with her many 4-H project leaders taught her a variety of skills including how to listen, be respectful and be cooperative as well as specific skills in photography, beef cattle production, sewing, foods, nutrition and more.

For many 4-H members, the time spent with an adult outside the family also gives them one more caring person in their lives and some develop a lifelong relationship with their 4-H project leaders.

In Teton County, top 4-H projects include swine, shooting sports, foods and nutrition, beef, sewing, horsemanship, photography, quilting, exchange and leathcraft. There are members enrolled in theater arts, aerospace, weed science and knitting, as well as many other project areas.

Wolery says that the Clover Classes offered an opportunity for volunteer training and 4-H leader development, as well. The Extension Office provided guidance and curriculum to the Clover Class instructors.

Wolery applied for and received a small grant through the Montana 4-H Foundation to assist with the cost of Clover Classes. Some of the budget was spent advertising classes and promoting 4-H. The goal was to reach the traditional, enrolled 4-H members, and recruit new members.

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Six county-wide Cloverbud classes, designed for youth ages 5-8 years of age. Approximately half of the Cloverbuds enrolled in Teton County took part in the county-wide educational offerings.

Other Cloverbuds received education from classes held by community club leaders. Through the Clover Classes effort, six new adults became certified 4-H volunteers and eight more became episodic volunteers.

The Clover Classes were an offshoot of an ongoing training process for 4-H clubs, volunteers and members. Two years ago, Extension Agent Wolery met with organizational leaders from 4-H community clubs to provide individualized leader training customized to leader needs.

The goal was to reinvigorate the leadership at the club level and work toward project classes, workshops, leadership opportunities for youth and community service projects.

Over the last several years, Wolery has made a concerted effort to provide leader training in order to sustain high quality educational offerings for youth in 4-H.

Eighty-seven youth attended at least one of the educational opportunities with nearly 60 percent of the enrolled 4-H members taking part. There were also six county-wide Cloverbud classes, designed for youth ages 5-8 years of age. Approximately half of the Cloverbuds enrolled in Teton County took part in the county-wide educational offerings.

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Seventy-six people registered to attend Teton County 4-H Camp July 17-19 at Camp Rotary. The enrollment is a record high in the past dozen years. The number includes campers, counselors and chaperones.

Teton County 4-H Camp is open to all youth, not just 4-H members. Camp counselors and directors met throughout the year and attended a youth leadership retreat to allow youth to grow in independence and to allow an opportunity for generosity by contributing to team activities and being valued and needed at camp.

Camp counselors this year included Cody Ulsh, Ben Roeder, George Rice, Connor Hodgskiss, Skyler Anderson, Sarah Hodgskiss, Anne Rice, Ali Willekes, Abigail Konen and Katie Townsend. Also at camp as counselors in training were Amanda Willekes and Luke Murnane.

Camp directors were Caroline Rogers and Susan Snyder, both of whom provided many opportunities for the counselors to “learn by doing,” aided counselors in planning and preparing the entire camp and brought their own special talents as educators to the camp program. Rogers is in her fourth year as camp director and Snyder has completed her second year. Camp would not be possible without the efforts of the camp directors, camp counselors and other volunteers.

This year, campers celebrated 100 years of Montana 4-H with a birthday-party-themed camp. To kick off the event, campers were able to have their faces painted, make balloon animals and hats, and play active team games.

Counselors taught a variety of classes including tie dye, painting crafts, piñata making, nature hikes, plant identification, archery, leatherwork, games, team-building activities, dancing, hypertufa pottery, cooking and more.

Campers enjoyed a game night, camp fires, songs, vespers, a dance and a water fight in the creek on a hot afternoon. Campers also took part in cabin activities and helped with camp cleaning details.

Adults who provided support at camp included Leona Sommerfeld as camp cook, Jo Lynn Miller as camp nurse, Steve Perry (Cascade County 4-H volunteer) as chaperone, Mark Major, Extension agent, Karoline Rose, Extension intern, and Laurel Anderson as a volunteer assistant.

Jane Wolery, Extension agent, assisted directors and counselors in planning the Teton County 4-H camping experience.

The goals of camp are to provide an opportunity for belonging, to develop mastery of a variety of skills and to allow youth to grow in independence.

4-H camp allows teens to develop leadership skills as they instruct younger 4-H members.

4-H camp means summer fun. These 4-H members cool off on a hot summer day. One of the goals of camp is to provide active recreation in a natural setting.
4-H Leaders for the Future

4-H is the premier youth development program offered through MSU Teton County Extension. With 156 enrolled members and 124 enrolled leaders in the 2011-2012 year, the 4-H program in Teton County is stable and thriving.

Extension agents have provided school enrichment programs, after-school programs and summer school programs for youth of all ages, increasing the numbers of youth reached through MSU Extension programs. The efforts of Extension agents are enhanced by many volunteer leaders in the 4-H program delivering numerous hours of education to youth in Teton County.

4-H members have acquired skills and confidence through project and community service work.

4-H members have taken top spots in statewide competitions, attesting to the level of quality of 4-H work by members in Teton County.

A few highlights of the 4-H program are the interstate exchange, international exchanges, county camp, leadership retreat, shooting sports, communication contests and the Teton County Fair. 4-H members are given the opportunity to learn skills through experiential learning, team-building activities, serving their communities and modeling leadership.

Nitrate Testing: A Valuable Management Tool

The MSU Teton County Extension office provides free qualitative nitrate testing to area producers. High nitrate levels can occur in forage crops, particularly in small grains grown under drought stress.

By testing small grains hay, producers are able to make management decisions that can affect cattle herd health. The rapid qualitative test helps producers avoid cutting when nitrate concentrations are at peak levels. Since peak nitrate levels occur in the morning, delayed haying or grazing until the afternoon of a sunny day can be one management practice.

Producers can also take precautionary measures if they suspect high nitrate concentrations prior to harvesting or feeding forage. There are opportunities for blending feeds to reduce the nitrates available to livestock. Nitrate poisoning can affect livestock.

Nitrate poisoning can cause spontaneous abortions in pregnant animals, as well as death in otherwise healthy cattle and sheep. Nitrate testing is another way MSU Teton County Extension helps agricultural producers keep a healthy bottom line.

Ag producers rely on MSU Teton County Extension for nitrate quick test to make management decisions.
Mark Major, Teton County agriculture agent, resigned midway through 2012. Major had been with the Teton County Extension Office since 2007.

Before leaving, Major was involved with Teton County weed pulls, a cooperative effort to reduce noxious weeds and weed seed transfer in the county; a cropping seminar to assist local agricultural producers; shelterbelt workshops to assist rural dwellers with energy and soil conservation through shelterbelt development and management; natural resource education, along with educating on possible impacts of oil and gas leases and community impacts; grain marketing to help farmers understand the financial implications of marketing; and, 4-H and youth education ranging from science to survival classes. The year of 2012 saw completion of projects, as well as plans for filling the vacated position.