

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
By Bill Arndorfer
Grundy County Extension Education Director
November 7, 2008

This Sunday, is the annual 4-H awards program where 4-H members are recognized for their hard work. 4-H, ISU Extension's youth development program, gives youth an opportunity to try out new activities they may not otherwise have the opportunity to experience. Many parents and other adults were once where these current youth are, nervous and perhaps scared to get in front of a group, but through the encouragement of a caring leader or other significant adult, were able to overcome their anxieties to make a presentation. Many of these former 4-Hers are leaders in their community, business or organizations. The 4-H youth, in partnership with adult leaders, will be serving as master of ceremonies for the awards program this Sunday giving them the opportunity to practice and display their public speaking ability and confidence.

Studies indicate that youth whose needs are met in positive ways are likely to develop into active citizens and contributing members of their families and communities. Youth development research emphasizes the importance of meeting four basic human needs of belonging, generosity, independence and mastery. 4-H is a youth development program that encompasses eight essential elements which research has shown to be key in successful youth development programs. I would like to briefly introduce you to these elements so you might better see how 4-H offers them to our youth.

The first essential element that 4-H offers, is a caring adult. This person acts as an advisor, guide and mentor who help to set boundaries and expectations (i.e., 4-H leaders). The second element is the provision of a safe environment in which youth do not fear physical or emotional harm while participating in the 4-H experience (from the learning environment itself, adults, other participants or spectators). Third, is mastery. Mastery is the building of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and then demonstrating the competent use of knowledge and skills.

Service to others, the fourth element, is a way for members to gain exposure to the larger community. Self determination, fifth element, helps young people foster a personal sense of influence over their lives, exercising their potential to become self directing, autonomous adults. Inclusiveness, the sixth element, creates an environment that allows a sense of belonging to develop, encourage and support its members. Healthy groups celebrate the success of all members. Futuristic, seventh element, helps youth see themselves in the future and use their hope and optimism to shape life choices that will involve them in future events. The eighth element is engagement. The engaged learner has a high degree of self motivation and an unending capacity to create.

You are invited to join the 4-H members and adult volunteers this Sunday and see for yourself the positive experience that 4-H is providing to the youth of Grundy County. If you would like to learn more about the 4-H program and how to get involved as a member or volunteer, please call the Grundy office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.