

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

University Extension

Non-4-H alum helps club work grow in Decatur County

Growing up on a farm outside Lamoni, Iowa, Karmen Smith got plenty of chances to watch her brother show cattle at the Decatur County Fair. But, she never made it into the show ring herself and never joined 4-H. “I don’t know why,” says Smith. “I always loved going to the fair and thought it was a great place to socialize and make friends.”

With the passage of time and start of a family of her own, Karmen not only thought it would be a great idea for her daughter to join 4-H, but decided to participate right along with her as leader of the local Bloomington Rustlers 4-H club.

In the nine years since, Smith has encountered her share of work with the job, but more than enough joys to offset it. She stresses the importance of goal-setting to her new 4-H’ers and says sometimes that can be a unique concept. She also admits that county fairs can sometimes be stressful for first-time exhibitors. “But, I tell them I’ll be there to show them what to do and what to expect—and that seems to help.”

Though her daughter has just one year of club work left before graduating from high school, Karmen is passionate about wanting to continue helping others. She also serves on the Decatur County Extension Council.

At this year’s fair, she was observed walking each new member through the judging process—how to check-in, when and where to appear, where to display their exhibits—plus, she carefully introduced each one to the judges and other volunteers on duty.

After being commended for such a large group of first-year 4-H’ers, Karmen responded, “See, we’re doing our part to help the county reach 3% growth!” That figure was set as a goal for increasing 4-H club participation statewide this past year.

Each year Iowa 4-H involves more than 11,000 adult and older teen volunteers providing mentored, hands-on learning opportunities to over 123,000 Iowa youth. If you’d like to learn more about becoming a part of that process, contact your local ISU Extension county office. You can help build memories and skills that last a lifetime.



“It’s great to see new 4-H’ers receive their first ribbons and the smiles light up their faces.”

-Karmen Smith (right) volunteer leader, Bloomington Rustlers 4-H Club, Decatur County, Iowa

For more information about this and other ISU Extension programs, contact Karen Pattison, 4-H & Youth field specialist, 641-342-3316, kpatti@iastate.edu, or, Jack Van Laar, Decatur County Extension Education Director, 641-446-4723, jvanlaar@iastate.edu

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