

100 Years and 50 Million Alumni Later, 4-H Changes With The Times

(NAPSA)—2002 marks the centennial anniversary of 4-H, an organization originally founded to educate rural youth about farming. Today, 4-H boasts 50 million alumni worldwide and a presence in every county in America, offering more than 1,000 programs ranging from robotics and biotechnology to skateboarding and agriculture.

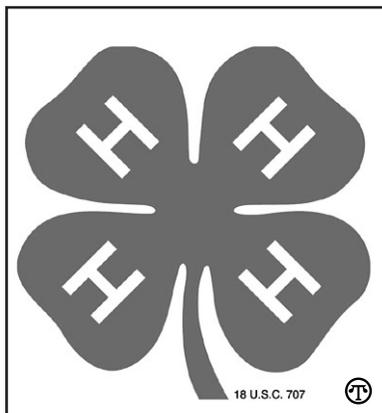
“When 4-H was founded 100 years ago, the U.S. economy was largely agriculture-based as were many of our programs,” said Donald T. Floyd, Jr., president and CEO of the National 4-H Council. “Yet, just as our nation’s economy—and the interests of America’s youth—have grown more diverse, so, too, have our programs.”

As 4-H expanded the scope of its programs over the years, the organization also expanded its geographic reach. Today, 35 percent of 4-H’s 6.8 million members reside in the nation’s cities and suburban areas, whereas only one in ten members lives on America’s farms. In addition, 30 percent of 4-H youth represent minority populations, which is the fastest-growing segment of its membership.

The fact that 4-H delivers a variety of programs to diverse communities negates the popular perception that 4-H is only for rural youth. “Many Americans still associate us with state fairs, cows and apple pies,” remarked Floyd. “While agricultural programs are still a vital part of 4-H, they don’t provide a complete picture and are only several pieces of a very large puzzle.”

4-H Roots

In 1902, 4-H was established to provide better agricultural education for youth. Founded through collective efforts of several individuals, 4-H clubs sprung up around America, with parents serving as volunteer leaders, and educators providing appropriate educational materials. From the beginning, 4-H



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approached youth education through learning by doing.

The organization’s first emblem—a three-leaf clover emblazoned with H’s for head, heart and hands—was designed by O. H. Benson, an Iowa teacher, who established a federal-state-county program for 4-H through cooperative agreements. The fourth clover leaf, representing health, was added several years later. The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 formally established the Cooperative Extension Service and provided public support for extension programs and 4-H.

4-H in Times of War

4-H has a long history of supporting emergency and war efforts. During World War I, 4-H’ers contributed through food production, conservation, canning and other wartime efforts. By the beginning of World War II, 4-H established seven national war goals. Three goals focused on increasing food production, and the remaining four helped youth define their citizenship responsibilities in times of war.

Today, as America wages war against terrorism, 4-H continues to play a role. In New York City,

4-H provided counselors for children, initiated a “Teddy Bears That Care” drive and arranged for students and college recruiters to meet at the local Cooperative Extension Office in New York City when area high schools were closed.

“It was amazing to watch the outpouring of support from 4-H’ers across the country,” said Cathann Kress, assistant director of 4-H at Cornell University. “We’ve received donations from 4-H programs nationwide, and with these funds we are going to be able to provide support programs for New York and Washington, D.C. youth.”

4-H Today

While 4-H programming has changed, its longstanding goal of bringing youth and adults together for the benefit of their communities has never been stronger.

4-H is commemorating its centennial by identifying the needs of youth and communities nationwide and developing a youth-led action plan to address these needs. Through a series of Local, State and National Conversations, youth, adults, community and civic leaders are uniting throughout America to discuss ways to improve their communities. The findings and recommendations of the Conversations will be the basis for an action plan that will be delivered to President Bush, members of Congress, governors and others in April.

An outgrowth of the Conversations is the Power of YOUTH Pledge campaign, a nationwide drive to encourage youth and adults to volunteer their time in service to their local communities. Almost two million hours have been pledged to date.

You can pledge to help your community at www.4hcentennial.org. For more information on 4-H, contact your county Cooperative Extension Service.