

Ruth Akers patterns her days around 4-H activities

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As the end of the school year nears, and young people look toward a summer full of activities, many of the youth in the southern most portion of Lancaster County will plan work on various 4-H projects ranging from capons to table lamps. As with every youth centered activity, there are several dedicated adults who are willing to put time and talent into organizing and overseeing the activities. One such individual is Ruth Akers from Quarryville.

For the past seven years Ruth has been a 4-H leader in the sewing club and she has been Southern Lancaster County Community Club organizational leader for six of those years.

Over the last few Spring and Summer seasons Ruth has enrolled as many as over one hundred young people in the nine or ten projects offered by the community 4-H club. Sewing, cooking and crafts are the three most popular projects according to recent enrollment trends, Ruth pointed out.

Mrs. Akers has sewn not only for her family, but for many others for years, and her natural interest in sewing led her to help with the first sewing 4-H club seven years ago. The next year she undertook the time consuming task of organizing the various clubs, finding leaders and setting up community wide 4-H activities.

About one-hundred children and young adults from the ages of eight to nineteen turn out each Spring to learn more about a previously taken project or to learn about something entirely new to them.

The swine club will have a new leader this year, Richard Meyers. The capon and strawberry projects will be supervised as in recent years by Clyde Aument. Field corn and sweet corn projects will be under the direction of Dennis Allen, Kirkwood. Handiman club, a popular project involving wood-working skills, will have a twelve year minimum age limit so that the leader, John Ramsey, can handle the workload and scheduling without devoting several nights out of each week to the 4-H projects. Ruth says she is working hard to find someone in the area who has tools and interest in woodworking with younger children so that the ones who are looking forward to taking the handiman project and are less than twelve years old will not be disappointed.

Cake decorating was a new project for the Solanco Community Club last year when Ruth recruited two women — Eleanor DeLong and Vickie LeFever — to take the club. Eleanor has the club meet at her home with Vicki assisting her. This club also has a twelve year age minimum.

Crafts, a popular project at present, will be conducted by Labertha Tindall again this year. Donna Kreider will again work with the cooking projects. The sewing club, which generally includes over fifty girls will be in Ruth's hands as she is assisted by fourteen helpers. The first year sewers make hand sewn projects such as slippers and ponchos from wash cloths and ready-made dry goods using basic joining techniques. They also learn to sew on three kinds of buttons.

The second year projects are patchwork skirts with zippers. Third year sewers make sleeveless dress or jumpers with facings. Fourth year projects include set-in sleeves and fifth through seventh year projects may be whatever the member wishes to select with supervision from the leader.

The first year girls meet at the high school to sew on machines in the home economics department under the supervision of several helpers and Ruth. The older girls often meet in the homes of helpers to complete their projects before club round-up and judging in August. The girls are encouraged to participate in County Dress Revue that month in addition to having their garments judged within the community club.

Ruth explained that the Solanco Club should probably be split into two clubs. The group now covers a large geographical territory ranging from Willow Street south to the Maryland Line and east to Kirkwood. Having a smaller group of members to work with at a time would benefit the individual member, Ruth added.

Her involvement in 4-H in the past few years has given her the opportunity to see several changes occurring in the com-

munity. First Ruth finds that, although there has been a considerable amount of residential building and many people have moved into the area who are not farm families, these families and their children are not seeking out 4-H projects. Occasionally, she says, a parent will call her who has been in the area for a year or two and inquire about a 4-H project for his or her child, but not very many do.

One aspect of the economy, the rising cost in gas, may be a noticeable factor in 4-H as well as other organizations' participation. "Parents are not taking their children everywhere the way they did at one time. They stay home more now than before," she explained. If the community club were divided into two clubs, the distance members would have to travel could be decreased, she reasoned.

Perhaps because of the increased costs of transportation, Ruth suspects that the decline in activity participation has resulted. "At one time we held club meeting from March through to Christmas," she said. "Last year we planned roller skating parties, swimming parties at the Legion Park Pool, and a picnic for the family. The attendance was so disappointing at all these functions that we are seriously considering holding only one or two community club functions this year," she stated.

When talking with extension leader Nancy Meyers, she found that the Solanco Club was not alone in this respect. A trend seems to have developed where parents are much more restrictive in all the "running" that they were accustomed to doing in the past.

A primary concern that Ruth has is the need for more adults to take part in the leadership roles. "We could offer more clubs and handle many more children if we just had more leaders," she lamented. "I'd especially like to find someone who is interested in being a leader who has been a 4-H member herself," Ruth explained. "They already know what the program is all about. I did not go to 4-H when I was young so it was all new to me," she added.

One leader who was schooled in the 4-H program as a young person and who is interested in carrying on its traditions and principles for the present members is Sharon Kleinz, Little Britain. Next year she will be the community club organizational leader. Ruth will continue as the sewing club leader and turn the organizing over to Sharon. Ruth explains, "It takes a lot of time on the phone getting new helpers and leaders each year and talking things over with Nancy Meyers, the extension agent."

This year the beginning night for the community club will include displays of the various club projects and allow time for parents and members to ask questions about the projects and to then select the one or ones they wish to complete this Summer. "If the parents back the members it works better," Ruth said. Without adult leaders and parent interest and support the 4-H program would be far less effective.

Ruth is the wife of Curt Akers, mother of three girls and one son now married and working with his father on their dairy farm near Mechanic Grove south of Quarryville. While the children were little, Ruth said she stayed at home on the farm and took care of the children and helped with the work. After the children were older and all but the youngest out of elementary school, Ruth started working with the 4-H program in addition to supporting the programs, especially musical, in her church.

She joined the Farm Women Society #31 and has in the past few years been increasingly more involved with Inter-State Milk Producers' functions since her husband was elected director. She also works with the Solanco Fair Association in the sewing judging and display department. She sees 4-H as a way to teach basic skills, leadership and responsibility to all young people not just those from farm families



Ruth has always enjoyed sewing, not only for her family which includes three daughters and one son, but also for many other people in the Quarryville area. Her natural talent in sewing led her to help as a leader for the sewing project when the club began seven years ago. The next year she became organizational leader, a job she has done for the last six years.



Her job as sewing leader keeps Ruth busy on the phone.

As part of her job as club reorganizational leader, Ruth spends lots of time at her desk.



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