

Nancy Hoke served as a 4-H project leader for stamp collecting, a hobby she became interested in when her daughter took it as a 4-H project. Here she looks at a sample page of her collection.

4-H leader learned by doing

BY SALLY BAIR
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Editor's Note: the week of Oct. 7 to 14 has been designated National 4-H Week to recognize the young people and leaders who make 4-H the largest youth organization in the United States. Many adults across the nation volunteer their head, heart, hands, and health as well as their time to help young 4-H'ers "learn by doing."

LEBANON — Nancy Hoke was "drafted" as a 4-H leader by her county agent husband Dennis, but learned on the job and through the process became a concerned, caring leader and a true supporter of the 4-H club program in Lebanon County.

Never a 4-H'er as a child, Nancy recalls that when their oldest son was nine, her husband told her, "They don't have any leaders in this area." She rose to the challenge, organized a community 4-H club through an existing livestock club and began a 17-year career as a 4-H club leader.

Although the Norsolebco Club was initially an agriculture club and offered "collecting" projects, it now runs the gamut of home economics projects as well. The club averages 50 to 55 members annually, and usually offers about 10 different projects.

Just last year Nancy decided to give up the responsibilities of organizational leader, saying, "Last year I thought I was getting stale, and I wasn't coming up with good ideas."

So she found two people who were willing to work together as leaders, and she now returns to being a project leader. Of her successors, Nancy says, "They make a great team."

Asked if it was difficult to find project leaders, Nancy said, "No one ever said directly 'no.' If they didn't want to be a regular leader but wanted to help, that was okay." Eventually, she says, many helpers realized it wasn't so hard and decided to be leaders themselves.

She added, "As organizational leader I was blessed with a lot of good, capable leaders."

Nancy feels she has benefitted from being a 4-H leader, and explains, "it gave me a chance to meet a lot of nice people - parents, children and other 4-H leaders."

She has also had the opportunity to travel through her 4-H involvement. She has been a chaperone for state events and was

a participant in the 4-H Leaders Forum held last spring for leaders from around the state. She found that especially helpful because of the chance to share ideas on how the program runs in other counties.

Of course she feels 4-H benefits the members too. "It gives them an opportunity to grow. You can measure the growth. Some have grown so much they have gone beyond me." She also supports the competitive aspect of 4-H, saying, "A 4-H'er competes against what he was before. They can all be number one, but they must meet the standards."

There have been some definite changes over the 17 years that Nancy has been a leader. "Now there are more urban and suburban children. In the first few years most children were from a farm or had some acreage."

Another big change is the number of other activities in which children are involved. "Other than church, 4-H used to be the big activity," Nancy recalls. Now she points out that band, gymnastics, choir, camp, Girl Scouts and other activities all take time. This makes scheduling project meetings very difficult, especially when leaders try, as Nancy does, to show consideration for her members' very full schedules.

There is not as good a percentage of completion of projects, according to Nancy, because children often sign up for too many projects and don't have the time to complete them. "I think the quality of projects completed is just as good as it always was, but we have to get them to be realistic about the amount of time they have to do their projects." Vacation time wasn't a factor earlier, but now cuts heavily into 4-H time.

Parental support has eroded over the years too. Nancy says, "I think 17 years makes a big difference in how many mothers are working. Those parents want their child to succeed, but we have to depend on the parents to get their child to the meetings." If a mother is working, often the child cannot attend a daytime project meeting.

A member of the 4-H Board of Directors in Lebanon County, Nancy says the Board has determined that they are losing 25 percent of their leaders every year. "We get new ones, but we are losing people who have experience under their belts."

Consequently, Nancy's com-

mittee designed a survey to find out why leaders quit as well as how they benefitted. As a control, they sent similar questionnaires to leaders with the same number of years' experience who are still leaders. They hope to compare the results and draw some conclusions which will slow the percentage of drop outs.

So far the return on the survey has been 50 percent, something Nancy considers good. Reasons for leaving 4-H vary from having schedules which are too hectic, to health problems to those who were just "tired," and felt they had been in it long enough. Some leaders felt that though they wanted to be project leaders, they found themselves doing other things. Nancy admits that the paperwork has grown tremendously, but as a county agent's wife, she said she understands the necessity for all the records.

Of course, there is a drop-out factor for 4-H'ers as well, and the Board would like to consider ways to counteract that problem. Nancy says, "We lose the middle school age member. That's the critical age, and for some reason, 4-H loses its appeal." Nancy says if they can keep the children involved through those critical junior high school years, then when they are 15 or 16 they remain loyal, involved 4-H'ers despite the pressures of jobs and other activities. "It will take a better mind than mine to figure out how to keep them in," Nancy says.

The 4-H Board is not only actively seeking answers, but has also undertaken a long range plan which covers many other areas. Nancy said the plan is good because it will give the board a chance to measure how well they are doing.

She said the Lebanon County 4-H program enjoys a lot of community support, but adds, "We have an image problem. People think of it as just cows and chickens." Nancy said people don't understand the wide range of projects available. A random telephone survey conducted by members of the board confirmed her opinion, showing that most people think 4-H is agriculture, cooking or sewing.

Nancy says she will readily teach any project for which the club can't find a leader, except for cooking and sewing. Last year she

supervised the dog and pet care projects and stamp collecting. She got involved in stamp collecting when her daughter took it as a 4-H project. She said project books and other materials have improved and offer a lot of help to leaders.

The five Hoke children were all active in 4-H, some of them at a "very early age," according to Nancy because she simply took them along when she was leading projects or meetings. "All of them got to go on to some kind of competitive activity," Nancy says. "It opened all kinds of doors." She said her sons learned the strawberry business well enough to earn much of their college money. All five children went to Penn State, where the youngest is still enrolled. Dennis and Nancy met there as undergraduates.

Nancy now works as a library assistant at the Cornwall Elementary School, a job she was offered seven years ago after serving one year there as a teacher's aids. Since reading is her favorite free time activity, the job couldn't be better suited to her tastes. A sociology major in college, Nancy says, "I learned on the job, just as I learned on the job to be a 4-H leader."

Nancy said she refuses to think of anyone as indispensable, and therefore will not remain a 4-H leader forever. Nevertheless, after 17 years she still feels a strong commitment to 4-H work.

It is to recognize leaders like Nancy that 4-H week was established. The salute lasts a week, but the influence of the leaders lasts a lifetime.



Serving as assistant librarian at Cornwall Elementary School, Nancy Hoke has a dream job, because of her love of books. Here she replaces some books on the shelf between visits from school children.

Chester Co. 4-H'ers gear up for National 4-H Week

WEST CHESTER — 4-H members in Chester County are joining the nearly five million young people nationwide in observing National 4-H Week, Oct. 7-13, according to Donna Connell, County Agricultural Agent/4-H Coordinator.

Using the theme, "4-H Building on Experience," members are challenged to see their own, as well as others' experiences and expertise in acquiring practical skills. They also are learning good health habits, developing respect for themselves and others, exploring career and leisure time opportunities, sharing responsibilities for preserving the environment, and developing leadership and citizenship skills.

Connell said that during the special week members of America's largest out-of-school youth education organization will celebrate with activities aimed at promoting individual growth and accomplishment, creativity, social responsibility, and family involvement.

In Chester County, there are over 225 volunteer leaders, working with approximately 1250 4-H members. These volunteers are among the more than 620,000 leaders nationwide, who each contributed about 220 hours of service last year.

4-H, conducted by the cooperative extension service at Penn State University, is open to boys and girls, nine to 19, wherever they live. Programs are conducted

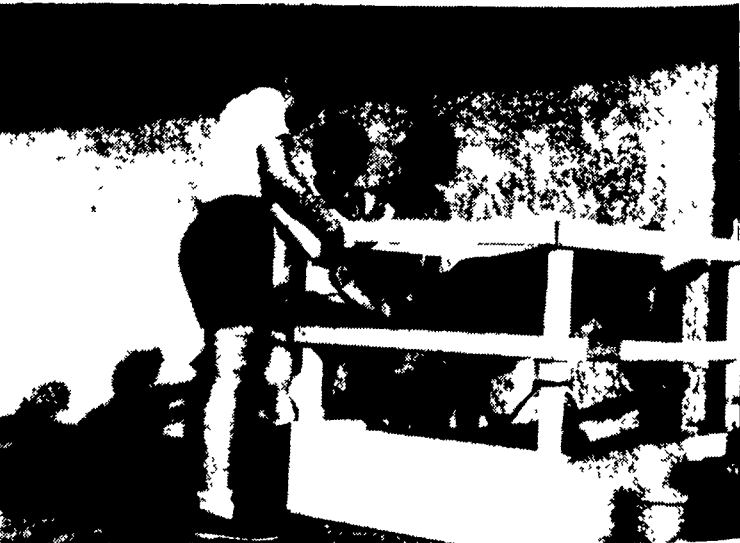
in the 3,150 counties of the United States, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Guam. Since its inception, about 45 million Americans have been involved in 4-H. In addition, some 82 countries around the world have youth programs similar to 4-H.

4-H thrives because of a unique partnership with the public and private sectors who contribute at the local, state, and national level. Not only does this partnership include financial support, but many business men and women volunteer their time and talents to

young people, as well, Connell said. She added that support at the local level is received through the Chester County 4-H Development Fund.

At the national level, support is channeled through National 4-H Council, a not-for-profit educational organization that uses private resources to strengthen and expand the 4-H program.

For more information on how you might be involved in 4-H, as a member or volunteer leader, contact Donna Connell, Chester County Extension Service, 235 W. Market Street, West Chester, PA 19380, 696-3500.



4-H'ers learn to take care of their project animals. Here a member learns to feed a dairy calf.