

Safety award illustrates Hawks 4-H Club's community spirit

COLLEGE PARK, MD. — You'd expect a paid professional worker to report good things about the agency which he or she represents. But when a nonpaid volunteer worker with wide experience gives a testimonial on the value of 4-H youth activities, you know it's not self-serving.

Such is the case with Elaine Shank, a rural, nonfarm homemaker near Welcome in southern Maryland's Charles County.

A former Cub Scout den mother, Elaine got acquainted several years ago with 4-H activities offered by the University of Maryland's Cooperative Extension Service for youth in the age range of 9 to 19.

She became a volunteer adult helper with the Hawks 4-H club in her neighborhood and eventually became its leader. Under her direction, the club has won the statewide junior group award for two consecutive years from the Maryland Agricultural Safety and Health Federation.

The club's most recent honor was presented March 14 at Walkersville, MD., during the safety federation's twelfth annual dinner meeting. Mrs. Shank was present at the Walkersville fire hall to receive a recognition plaque on behalf of her club.

She also accepted a plaque on behalf of her son, Michael, 16, who was this year's state winner of the MASHF award to individual senior youth. Participation in a high

school play prevented Michael from being present to receive the award in person.

In conversation afterward, Mrs. Shank noted that the prize-winning safety education activities of the club in general and her son in particular were excellent illustrations of leadership and community service instilled in youth by 4-H programs.

She says she is not surprised by the results of a nationwide poll taken last fall of 1,761 persons by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service and Agricultural Experiment Station with financial assistance from the Extension Service in the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

That randomly selected sample of individuals included 710 former 4-H members and 743 adults who had been members of other youth organizations. Some persons in the study had not been members of any organized groups during their younger years.

A key finding of the survey was that former 4-H members today are more active in community activities—particularly in leadership roles—than adults who had no 4-H experience.

The survey also showed that persons who did not participate in any youth groups during their younger years are currently much less involved as adults in community activities.

One reason for involvement in community activities by adults relates to the type of activities they

had as youth, observes Merl E. Miller, assistant director of the University of Maryland's Cooperative Extension Service with statewide responsibility for 4-H programs.

Dr. Miller notes that the nationwide Texas study showed former 4-H members giving higher rankings to personal development, knowledge, leadership and coping skills acquired than did former members of other youth organizations.

The study also indicated little or no difference in backgrounds, educational attainments and income levels among the nation's youth who were involved in organizations such as 4-H, Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA and YWCA, church organizations, FFA and FHA.

But the major benefit of 4-H membership, declares volunteer leader Elaine Shank, is that its diversity of project areas allows young people to be independent and develop self-reliance. And almost every project area, she notes, gives opportunity for growth in self-confidence through demonstrations and public speaking.

Safety, of course, is only one community service area in which Michael Shank and the Hawks 4-H club have participated during recent years.

Michael, a Lackey high school sophomore, also has been very active in 4-H horse and veterinary science projects. Both he and other members of the club sponsored rabies education clinics for the public at several locations last

year.

Seeing her son develop from a relatively shy person to an outgoing community leader through his 4-H activities has made Elaine Shank's toil as a volunteer leader worthwhile, she declared.

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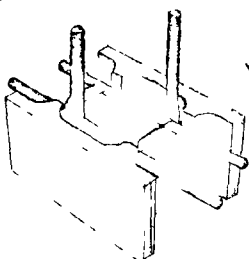
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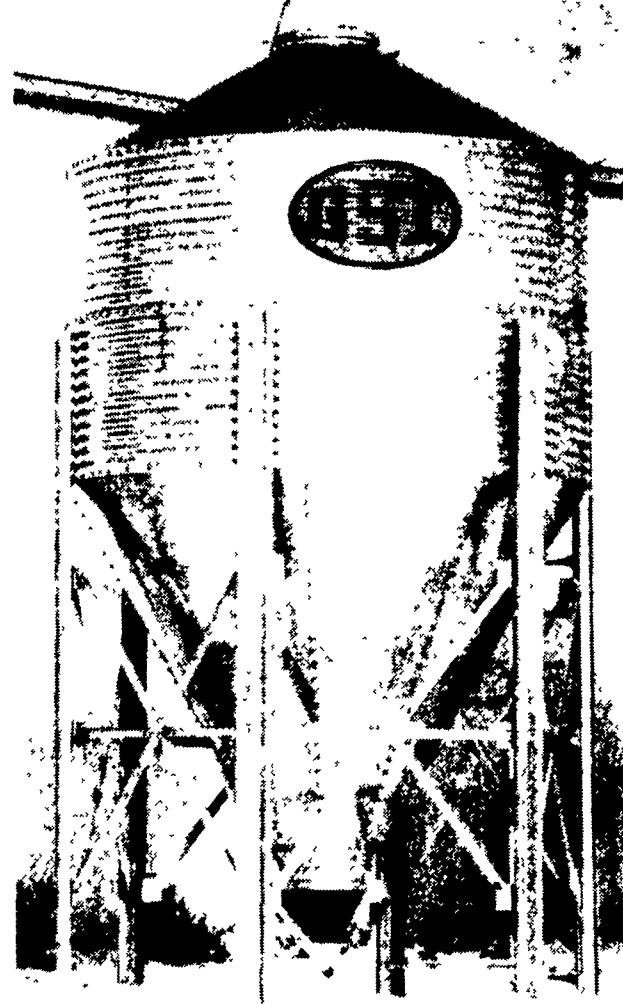
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