

It's Showtime For County 4-H'ers

*Teen, Agent Talk Livestock,
State Of Area 4-H Program*

BY KATIE DOAR

Ashley Hostetter is a sophomore in high school, but she seems older. Many people assume she's a senior.

"I get that a lot," Hostetter said.

She's not nervous about participating in the Rockbridge Regional Fair this week, which starts on Thursday. That's partly because, as a long-time member of 4-H, she has learned to be forward.

Hostetter's mother, Laurie Allgood, said that, after presentations from

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ASHLEY HOSTETTER works with her heifer Kay last week on her family's farm in Collierstown. (Katie Doar photo)

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collegiate animal judging teams, “We would always encourage the kids: ‘Go up, introduce yourself, shake their hands, say thank you’ ... and, for [Ashley], it really brought her out of her shell. Now she doesn’t mind getting up and speaking in front of somebody. Doesn’t think twice about it now.”

Hostetter will be showing a pig named Moose and a heifer named Kay. Moose will go up for auction, but as for Kay, who is “very pregnant,” Hostetter just hopes she will make it to the fair before giving birth.

Although she’s showing just two animals at the fair, Hostetter cares for many more on her family farm in the Collierstown area. Standing outside, her mother gestured to a sun-soaked pasture in front of the house, where many cows were grazing. “Majority of these animals are pretty much Ashley’s,” she said.

Hostetter led her pig and heifer around the farm. The pig is white with black stripes, and he trotted around with energy. The heifer, which looked uncomfortable in the late-day heat, nevertheless held out her chin and posed calmly for pictures.

Hostetter said that the hardest part of caring for a calf is “day-to-day maintenance and breaking it in.” Caring for a pig, on the other hand, “is not that hard ... you have to feed them every day, and it’s good to get them out and walk them ... [to] train your pig not to run from you — or to try to get them not to run from you

— because sometimes they just like to take off.”

She mentioned how, last year, her pig got into a big fight with another pig. Luckily, that incident was overshadowed by a greater success: Hostetter won supreme showmanship. Her prize was an intricate belt buckle, which she wore last week during the interview for this article.

Hostetter is grateful to 4-H for many reasons, but she said that not many of her classmates are involved in the program. When pressed for a reason, she took a minute to think. Then she said, “People are more into sports. But sometimes I feel like my generation just doesn’t want to do anything outside of school ... It’s the time commitment.”

When asked about what they might be doing — when they’re not doing anything — Hostetter laughed and said, immediately, “Playing games.”

Megan Sheets, the 4-H Extension agent for Rockbridge, told The News-Gazette that the number of livestock participants within the 4-H program has remained pretty stable over the last four years. But as the Cloverbud kids age, she hopes to see an upswing in participation.

The Cloverbud club, which began about 18 months ago, is a 4-H program designed specifically for children ages 5 to 8.

“That age group doesn’t have a lot of options in terms of extracurriculars, if they don’t play a sport,” Sheets said. “The Cloverbud club in Rockbridge was born out of that need for those kids that



ASHLEY HOSTETTER will be among the Rockbridge County 4-H’ers showing animals at this week’s Rockbridge Regional Fair. (Katie Doar photo)

don’t have any of those traditional interests.”

There’s a share program for families that don’t have access to land, so even suburban kids can raise livestock. This is important for the livelihood of the 4-H livestock program, especially since the number of participants from working farms is dwindling.

Even in Rockbridge County, Sheets has noticed a significant change. “Ten years ago, most of the people you’d see [in the 4-H livestock program] were living on working

farms. ... That’s not so much the case anymore.”

Sheets speculated that the shift was natural. “People have grown up. ... My brother and I are going to build homes and live on our family’s farm, but not everyone is so lucky. ... In a lot of cases a farm can’t support multiple generations of a family, and so young people need to purchase land to buy a farm, or get a house off the farm.”

Some residents have put their property in easements to ensure that their land — and the land of Rockbridge

County more generally — won’t be turned into a parking lot or a shopping mall. But the easements also restrict property owners in terms of what they can build on their land, and by extension, how much of their family they can accommodate, she said.

When asked about the future of the 4-H livestock program, Sheets said, “I want to see growth. But I just want the community to support the program like they always have. It teaches the youth so many things. It’s an experience that can’t be rivaled.”

For Ashley Hostetter and her mother Laurie Allgood, the 4-H livestock program instills in its youth intangible character traits, like respect and a sense of responsibility. But it also teaches basic facts about life.

Allgood said that some youths “don’t even know where eggs come from. They think hamburgers are made out of ham! Even the kids in this county.”

Hostetter chimed in, “Kids around the county should know where their stuff comes from.”

A group of second-graders will be going to the fair on Thursday morning, and Hostetter will help show them around, and instruct them about the animals. She said that a group of fourth-graders usually comes, too, and they learn about raising animals along with other topics, like soil conservation. Hostetter’s big events will take place on Friday. The 4-H showmanship is Friday morning, and the 4-H live auction will be later that evening.

Her future goals include going to college and starting a career in agriculture, Hostetter said. But there’s a strong chance that she will come back to the 4-H world and support it.

Sheets, who already works in the 4-H world, said, “It’s never the same day twice... I don’t feel like it’s a job.” Once, Sheets said, a girl at 4-H camp asked her, “Megan, what do you do for money?”

Megan laughed. She said, “They think I do this for fun. And they’re right, it is fun.”

A New Era In Scouting

Local Girls Now Joining (Boy) Scouts

BY KATIE DOAR

On Aug. 20, three girls gathered in a small room with a white board and an American flag in the basement of Grace Episcopal Church. It was their first Scout meeting. In the larger room next door, Scout Troop 29 met as usual. Intermittently, boys from Troop 29 would travel into the girls' room to speak with Sam King, the long-time volunteer leader who was in the midst of explaining the badge system to the new Scouts of Troop 92.

"The badges are like a memory board of all the things you've done," King said.

Penny Peach sat next to King, and every now and then chimed

in to help explain the uniform: where to sew the badges on, and how. At 18, Peach, has a long history of scouting experience. She is president of her Venture Crew — a co-ed offshoot of scouting that focuses on outdoor adventure — and she used to be a Girl Scout. Now, she's joined Troop 92 to lead the younger girls and work toward earning her Eagle Scout badge.

Until this year, becoming an Eagle Scout used to be a boys-only endeavor.

But, back in February, the Boy Scouts of America made a controversial decision to change its name and its policy: the organization would now be called Scouts

BSA, and they would allow girls to follow Boy Scout programming — now "Scout" programming — in all-female troop units.

So, in the late summer, following the change, Mary Deacon, Mattie Robinson, and Penny Peach gathered to form the first-ever girl Scout troop — not to be confused with Girl Scout troops — in Lexington. A few weeks later, Danielle Smith also joined.

At this first meeting, the girls were relatively quiet. The feeling was like the first day of school, when some necessary details and inevitable shyness must be dealt with before the real business of learning can start.

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The two younger girls were wary of an interview with a reporter, too. Some even hid. But after encouragement from her mother, Mary Deacon turned around and explained, very steadily and with eye contact, why she wanted to join Scouts.

“I wanted to learn to build a fire,” she said.

Penny Peach, who was energetic and talkative, answered a question about how she got involved with scouting in general. She gave a response that would be familiar to those in scouting circles.

“Mostly it was through siblings,” she said. “I have an older brother who was in crew and Boy Scouts, and I remember that a lot.” After she moved and left her Girl Scout troop behind, Peach decided to join Venture Crew because of the memories she had of her brother going on exciting hiking and camping trips.

In elementary or middle school, Peach’s only scouting option would have been the Girl Scouts, since Venture Crew caters to high school students only, ages 8-14. But now, younger girls will have the choice that Penny didn’t get to make, deciding between Scouts and Girl Scouts. And while it may seem like a negligible choice on the surface, it might matter to girls who have grown up watching their brothers hike and camp as part of a Scouts BSA troop. The pervading impression is that Scouts has more to offer when it comes to outdoor activities, while Girl Scouts tend to focus more on volunteer work and learning for future careers.

And yet for Jennifer Pfister, the director of communications for the Girl Scouts of Virginia Skyline, that pervading impression is a false one. Both of the organizations are based in the outdoors, she

said, even if Girls Scouts does try to offer opportunities for all kinds of adventures beyond getting back to nature. According to Pfister, Girl Scouts has recently been concentrating on involving girls in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). They’ve added 18 coding badges and nine cyber security badges. It might be that one’s degree of involvement in the outdoors ultimately depends on the interests of the troop and the skills of the volunteer leader.

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Whatever their reasons for joining Scouts instead Girl Scouts, the girls’ decision to form Troop 92 could be seen as historically significant. Girls have wanted to join Boy Scouts — now called Scouts — for over 100 years.

As early as 1909, a group of uninvited girls showed up to a Boy Scout rally at London’s Crystal Palace. Their khaki uniforms were nearly identical to the boy’s uniforms, and they had fashioned them themselves. At first, British Boy Scout founder Robert Baden-Powell allowed them to join in the Scouting activities. But a few months later, perhaps at the request of a disapproving mother, Baden-Powell and his sister Agnes announced their intention to create a distinctively female scouting group. The group would be called “girl guides,” named for their guiding roles in boys’ adventures.

But the problem of the uniform remained. That’s because the khaki outfits, designed after the uniforms of the British army, were meant to encourage boys to imagine themselves as future soldiers.

This troubled British citizens in the 1910s. An anonymous Girl Guide Gazette contributor wrote, “[I] fear it may lead to a spread of such

horrors as women pretending to be soldiers, and going about as recruiting ‘officers’ dressed up in uniforms and calling themselves ‘sergeants’ and ‘corporals’”

Fast forward to 2019, and the reviews are still mixed about girls joining Scouts. Some have been positive about the change, while others, outraged, have pulled their sons out of Scouts. But now, the critics don’t mind girls “pretending to be soldiers.” They’re upset because they believe that the integrity of the all-male program is being compromised for the sake of inclusion. For example, Nicole Russell wrote in the Washington Examiner, “How exactly will girls, who eventually will become women, benefit from constantly invading on the sacred space that is a boys’ playground?”

Ironically enough, the Girl Scouts are on the same side as Russell, but for different reasons. They’re less concerned about invading boys’ sacred spaces, and more doubtful that Scouts BSA will be able to offer programming that suits girls’ needs. When asked about advantages that the Girl Scouts might have over Scouts, for instance, Pfister pointed to the years of research.

“All of our badge work is based upon research about girls. We try to offer something that is designed for them. Most of a girl’s life is co-ed ... [in girl-only spaces] girls have freedom to explore, to take healthy risks.”

As for Scouts potentially poaching Girl Scout members, Pfister said that the change hasn’t affected numbers in Virginia at all, although there has been some confusion. As a result of the similar names of the organizations, some girls have accidentally signed up

to be (girl) Scouts, when they meant to be Girl Scouts.

To be clear, even when girls join Scouts, no one’s sacred space is actually being trampled on. Troop 92 (girls) and Troop 29 (boys) are separate troops. And, for the most part, they will have their own outing schedules, a detail that matters less to Scouts and more to parents who might enjoy the convenience of joint activities if they have children in both troops. In special cases, King said, it might work out for the two troops to do activities together, but if they go camping, for example, the girls would have to camp three or four sites up from the boys.

So the boys will retain their sacred space after all; girls are merely being allowed to follow the boy’s program in a separate troop.

King said that he hasn’t picked up on much negativity about the change locally, and he also implied that the critics don’t have much cause for concern. Despite recent changes, including an update that allows gay scouts to become scoutmasters when they turn 18, the basic tenants of scouting have remained the same, King said. “Owing our allegiance to our country and to God are institutional values. We just feel that that’s important. Those are our tenants ... being reverent, being clean, being honest, trustworthy — what’s wrong with that? And that’s what we follow. You don’t have to be a boy to do that; you can be a girl, too.”

Joe Barton, a law student at Washington and Lee who, according to King, was “big time in Scouts,” serves as a volunteer leader at Troop 29’s meetings in his spare time. When asked about girls joining Scouts, Barton was positive.

“I think it’s excellent. It’s not supposed to be a gender

thing ... Scouts has always been about character and leadership development.”

King agreed.

“I don’t think there’s any challenge a girl can’t do,” he said.

Should troops 29 and 92 ever decide to go on outings together, one of the benefits besides making new friends might be the pooling of numbers and resources. The girls have just four members and are hoping to add more. Although the boys’ troop has more members than the girls, there are less now than in recent memory.

“Back in the day,” King said, “everybody joined Scouts ... Now, there are just so many organizations to compete with.”

Troop leaders are harder to come by, too, as parents get busier and busier. This puts more pressure on the volunteer leaders that do come out. King said that he spends about 20 hours a week organizing plans for Troop 29, and that he expects to work 10 now that he is a leader for Troop 92. When asked about the hardest thing she’s done in her history of scouting, even Penny Peach reported that it came down to numbers.

“The hardest thing is trying to do too many jobs because you don’t have enough people,” Peach said.

But even though there are less now than there have been in the past, Troop 29 still has many loyal members, several of whom have recently become Eagle Scouts. Even with all of the distractions of the 21st century —and perhaps because of them —current Scouts revere the program, and feel indebted to it.

Joe Barton, for example, said that he has stayed involved in scouting in order to give back that sense of peer

mentorship that he received as a younger Boy Scout.

Other scouts, like Noah Knick, who was featured in this paper for his Eagle Scout project involving U.S. flag drop boxes, have expressed gratitude for the lifelong friends made as result of scouting.

King also posited that the scouts who stay loyal to the program are the ones who would like a challenge.

Scouts are known for learning how to exist in nature without modern comforts, for example. They learn how to live off the land, how to read a map, and how to build a fire. These things can seem anachronistic in the world of GPS and fast food, but many would deem them important skills nonetheless. Even if learning how to read a map isn’t an absolute necessity these days, there are reasons — outside the scope of practicality — to keep the old ways of doing things around.

Those reasons might have to do with the character that comes from being resourceful and patient, and going step by step, instead of taking the usual short cuts. There’s also a certain excitement that comes from studying and appreciating a map, for example, rather than scrolling through an iPhone.

Now, girls in and around Lexington will be able to participate in Scouts activities, thereby accessing more opportunities for exploring nature, and meeting friends and mentors.

“There’s girls that would like a challenge,” King reiterated. “They would like the recognition to be able to earn Eagle Scout.” He singled out Penny Peach, the 18-year-old Scout who will help lead troop 92’s younger members. “She’s a great example.”

For The Love Of Cole

Parade Helping To Raise Funds For Family

BY KATIE DOAR

Glasgow resident Nicole Rogers cares for her sick 2-year-old son by day, and then sits up at the computer for much of the night, gathering information.

“I come in every night and she’s got a notebook, and it’s just full,” Nicole’s husband, Shane Kidd, said. “She writes memos and stuff, what to eat, what builds the brain, what doesn’t.”

In May of this year, their son Cole was diagnosed with a rare genetic brain disease called “late infantile Leukodystrophy.” As the disease has progressed, it has taken away his motor skills; Cole can’t sit up on his own, speak, or move his arms and legs. Since the diagnosis, Rogers and Kidd have undergone the unpleasant experience of driv-



NICOLE ROGERS and Shane Kidd lovingly care for their 2-year-old son Cole, who was diagnosed in May with a rare genetic brain disease that has taken away his motor skills. Local artist Mark Cline and his wife Sherry are leading a community effort to raise money to help with the family’s medical and other bills. (Katie Doar photo)

ing hours to meet with doctors that shrug their shoulders and admit that they have no idea what to do.

“Most doctors have never heard of the disease,” Lisa Rogers, Nicole’s mother, said. “And [Nicole’s] got to edu-

cate the doctors and the nurses about how to take care of him, and what he needs.”

When local artist and entertainer Mark Cline learned of Cole’s illness, he and his wife, Sherry Cline, decided to combine a fundraiser for the

family with efforts to revamp the Goshen Christmas parade.

For every float entered in the Dec. 14 parade, \$100 will be donated to Cole’s nonprofit charity, which is managed by Sherry and Mark Cline. The Clines will distribute the

donated money to help pay for Cole’s family’s medical expenses, rent and utilities. Donations separate from the parade can be made online at www.fortheloveofcole.com,

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or in person at the Bank of Botetourt.

Mark Cline told *The News-Gazette* that around 40 floats have already been entered, and that, as word has gotten around, more donations have been coming in.

Goshen's Christmas parade used to be a major event. But recently the parade has been largely dominated by fire and rescue vehicles. Only about 15 individual families showed up to watch last year, according to Cline.

"It was more like a fireman's meeting," Cline said. "So we thought maybe we can create a miracle in Goshen and a little magic in Glasgow at the same time. This is Christmas, so it's all about the healing."

Anyone who wants to enter the parade should contact Mark Cline or the town of Goshen; the sponsorship for Cole's charity is only active for actual floats, though, rather than for groups of walkers. Mark Cline is encouraging those who are entering floats in other local parades to bring them to Goshen. The parade starts at 4 p.m. on Dec. 14.

Nicole Rogers and Shane Kidd described their family as private, so, at first, they were skeptical about the idea. But eventually they decided to use the event to raise awareness as well as funds.

"We want somebody else not to have to go through this," Kidd said.

According to Rogers, Leukodystrophy can be prevented if its potential victims are aware that they are susceptible before the symptoms set in. There are tests that can identify the disease, but since most doctors don't know about it, much less average parents, there's not much of an opportunity for people to take the necessary tests before the disease becomes serious and deadly. To make matters worse, Cole's early symptoms seemed harmless. He often walked on tip-toe, Kidd said, and was uncomfortable in a car-seat, but plenty of kids act this way, so those behav-

iors didn't seem like cause for concern.

The family first noticed that Cole might need medical attention on his second birthday.

"We came up to do a little party, and we had presents here, and when he walked over to get his presents I told Nicole, 'Something's going on with his knees,'" Lisa Rogers said. "They looked like they were starting to go inward, so we thought he was bow-legged."

Rogers took Cole to a pediatrician, who suggested that Cole get fitted for leg braces at the University of Virginia Medical Center.

"It felt like we hadn't even parked the car and they had him in the emergency room," Kidd said. "We went in for braces and they looked at him and said, 'It's worse than that'."

After hours at the hospital, Kidd returned home for a work commitment. He traveled back with Lisa Rogers while Nicole Rogers waited.

"Then seven doctors come in with their chairs and sat around her and told her what the disease was, by herself, while she was holding the baby," Lisa Rogers said. "And the last doctor is the one that informed her that it was fatal. They told her that by herself."

Soon after Cole was diagnosed, he went into seizures that lasted for as long as six hours. Nicole Rogers then took him to the Carilion Stonewall Jackson Hospital, where they put him on life support, and then transferred him to a hospital in Washington, D.C.

Kidd and Rogers both complained that the D.C. hospital kept Cole in a crowded room; they said that the nurses were impersonal, and it seemed as if no one knew Cole's name. The doctors also didn't know much about the disease, and they didn't communicate effectively with the family. Kidd and Rogers thought that they were resorting to drugs to keep Cole sedated, so that he wouldn't be in pain.

"They said, pretty much, 'He's gonna suffer, all the way through,'" Rogers said.

The family eventually got Cole out of that hospital and transferred his care to Carilion in Roanoke, which they said is a much better and kinder institution, even if those doctors don't know much about the disease, either.

Many appointments later, they finally found a doctor in Pittsburgh who has been studying Leukodystrophy for 20 years. They made an appointment for early December, but had to cancel, since the insurance money hadn't come through. They are hopeful that Cole will get to see the doctor later in the month.

Recently, Kidd got to take Cole to the river near their house, which was Cole's favorite place to go before he got sick. He would go fishing there with his three older brothers, and play in the water.

"[Shane] was able to take him down in the stroller this past week and when they left the river, Cole wanted to go down and get in the water," Lisa Rogers said.

Kidd marveled at how quickly Cole's severe symptoms had come on, saying that one day, he was able to run and play, and the next day he couldn't move.

"Whenever [me and my older sons] were in the woods, he used to stand at the door and go 'Dad, Dad, Dad, Dad,' but now, we don't get words."

Throughout, Shane Kidd and Lisa Rogers have been grateful for their helpful friends, and for the tenacity of mother Nicole Rogers, who has been relentlessly making road trips across Virginia and the Southeast, searching for information, and pursuing experts that could cure her son.

"She was the stubbornest little kid," Lisa Rogers said. "When I told her that, she'd say, 'I'm not stubborn, I'm determined.'"

"We've been married 22 years," Kidd added. "And it's been a long ride, and this is definitely a test of our will. But she's tough; she's the matriarch, or whatever you call 'em.'"