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Toy Siler: Making 'blue-ribbon' kids through 4-H



Toy Siler did not plan on being a 4-H program assistant. In fact, she originally took nursing classes at the University of Central Arkansas. All that changed when her daughter joined 4-H.

Siler's brother-in-law was a county extension agent,

and his daughters were in 4-H, so Siler enrolled her own daughter in the program. She served as a volunteer 4-H leader for eight years, and when her 4-H agent retired, Siler accepted a job as the 4-H program assistant for Independence County. She worked there 16 years before retiring in 2011.

"I enjoyed seeing the shy kids blossom," Siler said of her 24 years with 4-H. "I also loved seeing them support one another, even in competition."

One year she took youth to the state competition, and a young lady placed first in tractor driving, which is normally a male-dominated competition. The boys who competed against her were quick to congratulate her.

"They were proud of her," Siler recalled. "That's what you want to see no matter what competition it is."

4-H members learn a variety of skills in 4-H, and Siler always tried to instill in them confidence.

"I had kids that would get first place out of a group of two, and they'd feel as though they didn't have any real competition," Siler said. "I always told them that it didn't matter whether they competed against 10 or 100, a blue ribbon was still a blue ribbon."

She also made sure the youth she mentored showed respect and took responsibility for their actions.

"I took many kids on trips all over the place, and I would make sure they cleaned their rooms," Siler said. "I always told them that they represented themselves, me, our county and our state."

Siler said her own daughter has made lasting friendships through 4-H.

"My daughter met a girl in 4-H, and they worked as camp counselors together," Siler said. "They became roommates in college and lived together for four years."

Siler has also enjoyed seeing her former 4-H members grow up and pursue their dreams.

"I try to keep up with some of them and what they're



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doing,” Siler said. “Some of them have gone on to get agriculture degrees or have become high school agriculture teachers. Others have gotten married and had children.”

After more than a decade of retirement, Siler stays busy with activities, including becoming a master fair judge and also becoming a Master Gardener in 2012.

“I thoroughly enjoy my flower garden, and I grow strawberries that my grandson picks for me,” Siler said. “I also like making floral arrangements for my family members’ headstones.”

Siler had a true passion for 4-H that is now carrying on with her grandson.

“I am the grandmother of a 4-H member, and I couldn’t be prouder,” she said.

She believes in a saying that still means a lot to her.

“I’d rather have a blue-ribbon kid over a blue ribbon every time,” she said. ☺



Master Gardeners offer online training



Interest in gardening surged during the COVID-19 pandemic as Arkansans took to the outdoors, and that interest doesn’t seem to be fading.

The Arkansas Master Gardeners

program, part of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, continues to be the state’s largest horticulture volunteer and education organization. Registration for its fall training, set to begin in mid-October, is now open.

This year’s training will be conducted via Zoom and will include five day-long sessions. Training will be scheduled 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.

The cost is \$75 and includes 40 hours of training and the Master Gardener handbook.

Trainees will learn about basic botany, soils and fertilizer, pest control and pesticide use. In addition, there will be classes on landscape design, vegetable and fruit gardening, annuals and perennials and other topics of interest to homemakers. Each new Master Gardener is

also paired with a mentor in their county.

“Our mentors are what sets this volunteer program apart from others,” said Berni Kurz, extension consumer horticulture educator for the Division of Agriculture. “They provide guidance to new gardeners and help answer questions.”

Volunteerism is crucial to many Cooperative Extension Service programs, including Master Gardeners. Members complete 40 hours of volunteer service after their training. To maintain membership, they complete 20 education hours and 20 hours of community service each year.

“Communities across Arkansas have benefitted greatly from the Master Gardeners’ work in public gardens, parks and other public spaces,” Kurz said. “You can see the work of Master Gardeners in almost every county in the state.”

Starting with just four counties and 40 members in 1988, the Arkansas Master Gardener program is now 3,200 volunteers strong in 67 counties.

For a program application, contact your county agent through your county Cooperative Extension Service office. A directory of county offices is available at <https://www.uaex.uada.edu/counties/>. ☺

Fritch wins Arkansas 4-H Governor's Award

Faith Fritch of Benton County won the 2021 Arkansas 4-H Governor's Award, the youth development program's highest honor.

Fritch received the award – and a \$3,000 scholarship – on July 29 during the annual Arkansas 4-H Awards of Excellence held at the C.A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center. As part of the award, Fritch's name will be added to a plaque on permanent display at the Arkansas 4-H Center.

The Arkansas 4-H Governor's Award recognizes one outstanding Arkansas 4-H member each year.

"It is always a tough decision for our judges because at this level, they are all so accomplished and have served their communities in such meaningful ways," said Angie Freel, associate department head for 4-H.

Selection is based on nominees' accomplishments in leadership, citizenship, community service, 4-H projects and activities and overall contributions to Arkansas 4-H. Four young women were named finalists: Fritch, Eva Berryhill of Leola, Sarah Gaskin of Bald Knob, and Jenna Frederick of Fort Smith. Finalists



each received a \$1,000 scholarship.

Last month, Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson and his wife, Susan, hosted a luncheon for the finalists at the Arkansas Governor's Mansion.

"Each of this year's four finalists has enriched the 4-H program in a special way," Gov. Hutchinson said in a recorded message played at the awards ceremony.

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Message from the director

What a pleasure it was for me to be a part of the Arkansas 4-H Awards of Excellence held at the C. A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center. I was impressed by the dedication and commitment that the winners had to Arkansas 4-H. I can only imagine what this program is like with full attendance and look forward to the next one. I am hopeful that I will get to see that next year. I want to compliment Benton County 4-H member Faith Fritch on her service as Arkansas 4-H state president and congratulate her on winning the Arkansas 4-H Governor's Award this year. While at the 4-H Center, I also witnessed the dedication of two room renovations made possible by generous donations from the families of loved ones who support Arkansas 4-H. Much like our retirees who contribute to the employee

scholarship fund, it is reassuring and humbling to know that so many people think so much of what we do.

I wish that I had better news on the COVID front. Over the past month, COVID-19 cases have risen to pre-vaccine levels not seen since January and early February. These cases are by far hitting the unvaccinated worse than those who have received the vaccine. This new variant also affects folks at a younger age, and there has been an increase in the hospitalization rate among minors. This is happening as schools re-open, which has many very concerned.



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September Birthdays

Alberta J. James - Sept. 1

Diana L. Baker - Sept. 4

Jim Denton - Sept. 4

Vickie Huddleston - Sept. 4

Johnnie L. Younger - Sept. 5

Bob Blake - Sept. 6

Michael Moss - Sept. 7

Barbara Singleton - Sept. 8

Carol Sanders - Sept. 8

Venetta Rice - Sept. 9

Jerry Wooley - Sept. 9

Catherine Grills - Sept. 12

Lee Hunter - Sept. 12

Raymond Benz - Sept. 16

Joe Paul Stuart - Sept. 16

Charles Albritton - Sept. 17

Janet Slate - Sept. 17

Irene Carlock - Sept. 18

Steven Simpson - Sept. 18

June Williams - Sept. 21

Bill Frank Jones - Sept. 21

Gloria Mayhugh - Sept. 21

Belinda Weaver - Sept. 21

Sherry Ream - Sept. 22

LeVeda Tate - Sept. 22

Donna Rothberg - Sept. 23

Willie J. Booker Jr. - Sept. 25

Stephen Vann - Sept. 27

William Dodgen - Sept. 28

Henry Rice - Sept. 28

Don Plunkett - Sept. 28

Bettie Wilson - Sept. 30

Welcome new retirees!

Sharon Reynolds, Ozark District Director

Sharon began her career with Extension in June 1976 as a 4-H agent in Arkansas County. After a time with Oklahoma State University, she came back to Arkansas Extension. She spent the last 12 years serving as the Ozark District Director. Sharon retired with 31 years of service.

Fritch, cont.

"I'm proud of each of you and the way you represent Arkansas and 4-H."

Fritch, who served as the 2020-2021 Arkansas 4-H state president, attends Henderson State University, where she is majoring in psychology and minoring in music. Her main 4-H project is performing arts. She has studied violin for nine years and voice for four years and has competed at the county, district and state levels. In 2019, she performed during the opening ceremonies of the National 4-H Congress in Atlanta. She now plays with Henderson State's strings ensemble and is part of the university's Chi Alpha worship ministry.

Aside from performing, Fritch is also an award-winning marksman and competed nationally in shooting sports.

"Through 4-H, I've had many successes, but my favorite success was having the honor of being elected Arkansas 4-H state president," she said. "I've been able to meet people all over the United States." ☺

Coming Soon:

Our Arkansas 4-H Dinner at the Vines fundraiser on Oct. 5 is sold out! But you can still participate in our **online auction**. You can view and bid on items online beginning Sept. 27 at app.galabid.com/ar4h.



Here's just a few of the items up for grabs:

- Razorback tickets
- Gourmet meal for 20
- Arkansas Travelers tickets
- UA Little Rock Trojan basketball tickets
- Restaurant gift cards
- Artisan crafts made by some of our Extension personnel

Check next month's Extension Cord for more details! ☺

Director, cont.

At the Cooperative Extension Service, we are doing our part where we can. I have asked all employees to include our COVID website and links to vaccination information on all Extension communications. We are also going back to more Zoom meetings and using personal protective equipment and social distancing at our events and in our offices. Hopefully, this latest surge will be met by higher vaccination rates and more herd immunity, and we can keep inching our way back to "normal." Stay safe! ☺