

University of Connecticut 4-H Program

4-H is a community of young people across America learning leadership, citizenship and life skills.

Summer 2018



UConn 4-H, Extension Centers and Schools Working Together

By Pamela Gray, New London County 4-H Program Coordinator

This is a story of how 4-H, community schools, and Extension resources can grow remarkable, inventive partnerships. The story begins when Immacula Perkins, the Intervention Specialist at Mahan Elementary School in Norwich, contacted Extension looking for assistance in planting a new school garden. She met up with Pamela Gray, the New London County 4-H Program Coordinator, and invited Pam to visit some of the classrooms and share activities kids could do in 4-H. Pam visited the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade classrooms with a 4-H nutrition activity for the students to experience, as well as information about 4-H and the Extension Center.

Two of the third-grade teachers contacted Immacula to set up a meeting with 4-H to see if there was a way to work together on 4-H activities for the classroom. Pam and Heidi Herz, the Extension Center Program Aide, brainstormed ideas with the teachers. They looked at areas that are the most difficult to provide hands-on education in school, honing in on skills needed for kids who are home alone after school and healthy food education. The 4-H Microwave Magic was a perfect fit. The New London County Extension Center, which has a full kitchen, is less than a mile away. The Mahan School 4-H Cooking Club was born!

Planning meetings between the teachers and 4-H staff developed curriculum and activities. Using 4-H

Babysitter's, Jr. Master Gardener Learn, Grow, Eat, & Go!, and 4-H eat.grow.fit activities to supplement the cooking activities, students would visit the Extension Center two mornings a month, with follow-up activities in the classroom.



Norwich Public Schools provides transportation for the students, and the New London County Extension Council donated money for food and supplies. The club started up on April 26, with the students making Cheesy Mac in microwaves, learning kitchen safety, and since they were starting their Plant Science objectives in the classroom, making "Sprout Houses" for their classroom.

4-H curriculum aligns with the goals of the NGSS (Next Generation Science Standards) for classrooms. The 4-H Experiential Learning Model of experience, share, process, generalize, and apply, meshes with the goals of NGSS.

By intentionally planning hands-on 4-H activities at the Extension Center

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Thank you to our Donors!

Every year our members rely on donations to make their 4-H year extra special. The gifts made by our friends, alumni, volunteers, parents and youth themselves, allow us to send youth to various national trips, to participate in state wide events and most of all to have fun while learning and trying new things. It is with the greatest appreciation that we thank you for your continued support and look forward to seeing you at one of our programs, fairs, auctions or camps. Your assistance truly helps us in following the 4-H motto of "To make the best better"!

which are linked to activities in the classroom, peer-judged, and linked to Common Core goals, the students develop a strong understanding in how what they learn at school is applied to their 'real' life, and vice versa. The teachers noticed a shift in willingness of the students to experiment, work together, try new things, and share ideas with each other already.

So far the only challenge has been fitting all the activities we want to do into our timeframe! The Club will finish with students working together (38 4-H'ers!) to cook lasagna and up-side down cake, in the microwave, make their table settings, and then eat their meal together. They will bring home a recipe book they made in the classroom.

The teachers, Pam, and Heidi are already planning for the Mahan 4-H Cooking Club to kick off as soon as possible in the fall. The goal next year is to hold an evening Family Meal, planned, cooked, and served by the students. In addition to providing unique learning opportunities for the students, the school has accessed other Extension resources like the Farm to City Initiative. This program also promotes awareness of the New London County Extension Center to the community.

UConn 4-H Members Win State VEX Competition and Compete at World VEX Competition

By Jen Cushman, Hartford County 4-H Extension Educator

Six youth from the Granby 4-H Club won the State VEX Robotics competition and qualified to represent CT at the VEX Robotics World Championship, April 29-May 1st, in Louisville, KY.

At Worlds, the youth competed in teamwork, programming and driving competitions. In addition, they were eligible for team awards for energy, journal, design and research project. Throughout the competition, these youth also networked with teams from around the world as they promoted 4-H through their team booth. The team placed in the top 5% in programming and top 11% in Worlds.

Since May of 2017, the youth have been learning about this year's Ring Master Challenge in preparation for the build season. Using science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) concepts, competition team members developed, designed, and practiced their robot driving skills. In addition, the 4-H'ers maintain an engineering journal of their robot design process in order to develop and strengthen their record keeping skills. Participants also demonstrate and hone their public speaking and research skills through the annual STEM Research Project which is also a component of the competition.

Supported by six 4-H volunteer mentors and parents, this group of 4-H youth competed as the only 4-H team in Connecticut. While 4-H volunteer mentors are there to guide and facilitate the youth, 4-Hers do all the design and construction work. Each member of the team is assigned a leadership role in a specific area. Team members meet 1-2 times per week for 8 months of the



year and then 2 to 6 times a week as the competition gets closer. Along with the leadership, STEM, teamwork, communication, citizenship and life skills that the youth gain they also develop entrepreneurial skills designing and running fundraisers to cover the expenses of the robot and competition fees.

Members implement the values of the 4-H motto to Make the Best Better by improving their robot after practice and competition sessions. 4-H members note that they have benefited from participating in the VEX 4-H Robotics Program by gaining and enhancing their skills; for example, in the area of spatial geometry or in programming their robot using the C language. Also, these experiences have provided opportunities for them to demonstrate and strengthen their teamwork and cooperation skills in preparation for their future education and careers. In fact, during the qualification rounds at the State Competition, the team was twice awarded the Judges Award for Spirit and Energy at the Regional Level and they were the Teamwork Challenge winners on the state level. The competition members also serve as mentors to the non-competition 4-H VEX Robotics group members. Lastly, members see their experiences in VEX 4-H Robotics helping them to identify future career opportunities. Beyond the VEX Robot competition, this project group of the Granby 4-H Club also attends UConn STEM events, participates in community service activities as well as county-level activities including the annual Hartford County 4-H Fair.

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A special thank you to the following donors who helped support the UConn Extension 4-H Youth Development Program last year through The University of Connecticut Foundation 4-H Centennial Fund.

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Congratulations to

Garrett Basiel who will be attending the University of Connecticut in the Fall of 2018 as an incoming College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources freshman. Garrett reflects on his experience with the 4-H program and how it helped prepare him for college:

My fingers felt raw, but I once again pulled back the bowstring and aimed down range at the target. After my quick lesson on safety and proper form, I spent at least four hours at the archery range that day in 2010 during my local 4-H fair. The arrows skewed across both the target and ground alike, but every time one hit anywhere near the center of the target, I was delighted. This single positive experience led me to learn not only about fletchings and points but about myself too.

As a novice 4-H club member, I made a very small contribution on the range when we brought our equipment out to local fairs. (Continued on page 4.)

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After hauling out the targets and setting up a safety line, I might chip in information on a shooter's form every once in a while, telling them to "straighten your feet" or "keep pulling back," but I still lacked the confidence to address the masses that poured through our setup. Despite these crowds, I managed to find time to shoot for myself. I would launch as many arrows as I could, reducing me to a sore set of fingers and a pair of tired arms trembling, just as they were my first time there. A year rolled past and, thanks to my club leaders, I was able to consistently nail the bull's eye.

Yet as my skill increased, my confidence and courage did too, and I came to discover how much I enjoyed assisting others. By the 2014 4-H Fair I felt ready to impart my knowledge onto others. As I matured and gained more experience over the years, I was able to fulfill assorted jobs on the fair ranges. I felt comfortable walking adults and teenagers through the process, but my hardest challenge was helping young children, who struggle to listen to instructions and even to pull back the bow string. I still remember the first girl who I knelt next to. I helped her straighten her arm and adjust her feet before I helped her tug back the bowstring. I urged her "Keep pulling, you're almost there" as I had heard my club leader say so many times before. We both smiled when her arrows hit the target. Each year I have helped at the archery range I have become more dependable. Now I even run the range, not only teaching but announcing "Begin shooting" or "Go get your arrows" whenever my leader is busy.

I am very grateful that teaching archery helped me come out of my shell. Addressing the groups of people coming through our archery range gave me new found courage that has carried over into other parts of my life. I now take on leadership roles in class, finding myself leading groups through trigonometry projects, and at cross country meets I feel more comfortable conversing with other runners. I feel ready to bring this same confidence over to my upcoming college years.

