

EXTENSION
SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell



ILLINOIS
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COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER
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4-H Cloverbud member Caleb, from Mason County, is one of 327 youth who participated in the 4-H Virtual Shows. Thanks to a lot of hard work, creative thinking, and ingenuity our 4-Hers were able to continue their positive youth development experiences despite the cancelation of the face-to-face events.

Positive Youth Development Continues Through 4-H Virtual Shows

Local 4-Hers did not let the cancelation of the regular 4-H Shows stop them from exhibiting their 4-H projects with the same pride and skill development as they have shown in the past. Thanks to the hard work, creative thinking, and ingenuity of the University of Illinois Extension staff, 327 youth recently participated in the 4-H Virtual Shows held in Fulton, Mason, Peoria and Tazewell counties.

“I appreciate the patience and diligence our 4-H families and leaders have displayed during this 4-H virtual show process. It was a new effort for everyone involved, including State and local 4-H staff, as well as project judges,” stated Joli Pierson, Mason County 4-H Program Coordinator. “I want to thank the youth and families who were resilient, chose to complete their 4-H projects, and worked through this new exhibition method.”

As 4-H staff worked to transition to an online 4-H Show, their priority remained to provide youth with positive youth development experiences. The online exhibit platform provided youth the opportunity and encouragement to prepare their 4-H exhibits and work with their animals to get them “show-ready.”

In exchange for face-to-face exhibiting and conference judging, 4-Hers photographed or recorded videos of their projects and wrote answers to typical conference judging questions. Unit-wide, 88 volunteer judges evaluated 1,090 projects online, provided feedback to the exhibitors. In doing so, they selected 187 State Fair winners, 110 State Fair alternates, and 192 additional award winners, such as class champions and best of show.

“As much as I miss the kids and judging in-person, I feel like I was able to take more time to give more advice and praise in my comments this year,” mentioned Tori Smith, Tazewell photography judge.

Two judges in Tazewell and Peoria counties also piloted a virtual conference judging experience with one photography class and one communication class. After the regular evaluation process was completed, youth were invited to meet with the judge via Zoom to have a conversation about their project and specific project skills. Six youth took advantage of the optional opportunity.

In a post-show survey, 91% of respondents indicated that, in the absence of an in-person event, the virtual show was a good option. An additional 4% even preferred this to the typical in-person event. “I’m glad we still have the opportunity to learn and show new skills and receive feedback from experts,” noted one participant.

Peoria County 4-H Federation members did not want to miss out on the leadership activities they normally take on during the 4-H show. They came up with several new ways to provide leadership virtually. They wrote and produced a Virtual 4-H Project Tour video that has reached 2,386 people on Facebook and YouTube. They also reached out to every Peoria 4-H member with encouragement and support to exhibit in the virtual show. Additionally, they turned the traditional Spirit Contest into a virtual contest and received two video entries created by 4-H clubs.

A variety of families shared stories with 4-H staff about new things they learned and experienced this summer.

A Fulton 4-H family shared how they had fun taking pictures of their animals, something they would not have normally done.



Tazewell 4-H mom Kristy Boecker wrote a thank you note to the staff and mentioned, “The [written] question about how they would ‘apply what they’ve learned to their life’ was the hardest question most of the time. We laughed about some of the ideas they came up with. Not all of them were put into print!”

In response to a survey question about their favorite thing about the 4-H Virtual Show one 4-H family shared, “When the chicken attacked Dad as he was filming.”

The 4-H Virtual Shows provided an avenue for mastery of skills, leadership development, problem-solving, and some memorable family time.