

Joyce Smith, Making a Positive Impact for 50 Years

*I pledge...My Head to Clearer Thinking,
My Heart to Greater Loyalty,
My Hands to Larger Service, and
My Health to Better Living, for My Club,
My Community, My Country, and My World.*

For five decades Joyce Smith has lived out the 4-H pledge as a devoted 4-H leader in Mercer County. In her role she has touched the lives of many youth, led them on the path toward success and helped shape them into future leaders and community builders.



Joyce's 4-H story began in the 1970's when her children joined 4-H and Joyce's volunteering journey started. The family joined Peppy Partners for a time, eventually becoming Saddle Teens Club members in 1975. Saddle Teens is a club focused on community service and horses, which was a perfect fit for their family. In the Club's early days, Myrna Adamson, Del Denson, and Ron Partlow were club leaders with Myrna and Joyce eventually becoming the main leaders. Joyce's love for serving youth, her community, and the 4-H program would continue to grow. After Myrna's passing, Joyce made sure that the Saddle Teens 4-H Club would continue the tradition of community service that Myrna had started. Joyce received many grants over the past four decades for Saddle Teens 4-H Club community service projects. The grants helped make it possible for the club to positively impact their community year after year. Under her leadership, Joyce's club has also received many Illinois 4-H Excel Awards for community service, along with many Club of the Year Awards for the past 49 years.

We had an opportunity to sit down with Joyce and ask her a couple of questions to reflect on her incredible service and many positive experiences as a 4-H leader.

What are the most memorable community service projects your club has done in the past?

"There are so many, it is hard to pick favorites, but if I had to just pick a few, they would be: The Winola Elementary School Windbreak Project where 4-H members planted 23 Norway Spruce trees, and 72 bushes. It was a three-year project done in phases; The Pen Pals and Reading program with Horace Mann Elementary School in Moline. This project was about increasing literacy and it was a huge success at Horace Mann Elementary. The Bethany Friends Project, this was a community service project to help support local homeless teens. It had a big impact on the youth we were serving and our 4-H members. We have done so many over the years, I have enjoyed them all. Community service will always be Saddle Teens focus. Youth must learn to give back, learn about their community needs, about their community leaders, so when they become adults, they will continue to be involved in community service and leadership. It gives them life skills."

What keeps you volunteering your time to the 4-H program year after year?

"I enjoy the kids and the families. Making a positive impact on these young children, watching them develop their personalities and becoming caring young adults. They keep me young, older adults talk about health issues and doctor's appointments, with kids, it is a whole different conversation. They make me think, use my brain. Every now and again, you get a little note from one of those adult kids thanking you that fills your heart with joy"

Tracy Pestle, 4-H Program Coordinator for Mercer County, shares her joy of working with Joyce over the years:

“Joyce Smith is such an amazing asset to Mercer County. Her devotion and love for her community and the people in it is evident in everything she does. Joyce is what keeps me going as the 4-H Program Coordinator. Not only is she a fountain of knowledge, but she also encourages and lifts people up just when they need it. The handwritten cards of gratitude or encouragement she writes seem to arrive at just the right moment. I am so grateful to work alongside her and am honored to call her my friend. If you see her, please thank her for her love and dedication she shares with your kids and the youth of our community. Joyce is growing true leaders in our community”

-Tracy Pestle

The Martin Family, congratulate Joyce on this honor of being recognized in the category of "Outstanding Women Volunteers"

“The Martin Family has had the pleasure of knowing and working with Joyce Smith for more than 35 years. It began when our daughter (Molly) joined the New Windsor Drill Team at the age of 7, and then became a member of Saddle Teens 4-H Club when she was 8, which was led by Joyce and Myrna Adamson at that time. Our son (Charley) was always present at 4-H meetings but had to wait 5 years before he was old enough to join. We are now a second-generation family in Saddle Teens 4-H Club with our two granddaughters (Paisley & Quinn).

Joyce Smith is a woman to be admired! With this being her 50th year as a 4-H Leader, she has touched the lives of many families. Joyce goes out of her way every day to give to others...family, friends, 4-H members, her church, and her community. She encourages children to go outside their comfort zone by coaching the kids at 4-H meetings to acquire leadership skills, speak in front of others through their talks and demonstrations, and participation in club activities.

Whether it is organizing and recruiting helpers for the lunch stand at our county 4-H horse show, planting a windbreak at an area school, decorating, and delivering pumpkins to seniors, having kids write thank-you notes to individuals...Joyce teaches all of us life skills that hopefully stick with us as we continue to grow.”

“We congratulate Joyce on this honor of being recognized in the category of "Outstanding -Women Volunteers". It is truly well deserved!”

- The Martin Family

Lorraine Kinsey, Mercer County Dog Club Leader, shares Joyce’s encouragement.

“I have known Joyce as a neighbor and 4-H friend for years. Joyce is a devoted leader because 4-H is a good thing for all kids. She tries to encourage members to try new projects, also another thing, sending handwritten thank you cards, a thing of the past. Joyce encourages members to do public speaking, which of course is important in all walks of life. Being a leader takes time and commitment, but Joyce likes it and feels it is worth her effort.”

-Lorraine Kinsey

Brenda Close, Hamlet Handy Helpers 4-H Club Leader, shares her admiration for Joyce.

“I was very happy to hear that Joyce Smith was being honored for her years of service as a 4-H volunteer! I met Joyce through 4-H and have always admired her ambition and dedication to the program. She seems to have a servant's heart and is always willing to help out; she is actively involved in so many of the 4-H activities year after year. I have a lot of respect and admiration for Joyce as she has devoted so many years to serving her community! Congratulations, Joyce, on receiving such a well-deserved and awesome honor!”

Sincerely,
-Brenda Close

Melanie Neuleib-Zimmerman, 4-H Horse Bowl Coach & 4-H Leader, reflects on the impact Joyce has made on numerous lives.

“Joyce Smith has been a pillar of the Mercer County 4-H program for 50 years and has influenced so many kids and families along the way. Tracy asked me for a favorite memory, and I honestly couldn't come up with just one. You can see her influence in so many lives and communities because of her dedication to the 4-H program and her love of community service. She had a huge impact on my sister Erin and me. It's because of her and my other leaders that I signed up as a leader as soon as I aged out of the program. Joyce has always been a cheerleader for all youth in her group and pushed them outside of their comfort zones to learn, grow and evolve into today's leaders. Joyce has been a leader, mentor and friend and has changed numerous lives for the better.”

-Melanie Neuleib-Zimmerman