

## Cultivating a new generation

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Snippy Doodles the clown and Crystal the stilt walker didn't plan to start a 4-H club. But that was before they met a boy named Jarrett who wants more than anything to be a clown.

The mother-daughter clown team, Renate and Crystal McIntosh of Smyrna, started Clowning Around 4-H in 2007 to teach Jarrett Cook and other children about their craft. The kids learn skits, magic tricks and how to make balloon animals.

"Jarrett wants us to put together a circus plan," she said, and laughed. "He's certainly an entertainer."

Clowning Around probably is not what most people picture as a 4-H club. These children do not grow livestock or bake pies. 4-H is no longer just focused on agricultural endeavors -- community members in Delaware have established clubs that teach leadership and citizenship in unusual ways.

Renate said her son, who is a member of Clowning Around 4-H, now is more comfortable with public speaking. The children serve the community by making balloon animals for nursing home residents and participating in local parades.

"You never know what to expect," Renate said. "They all have their own ideas and talents. When you put them together you never know what will happen."

The Harbor Lights 4-H Club in Lincoln focuses on drama production. Club leader Angel Magee said members are children 5 to 13 years old who act and are responsible for creating the majority of props and sets.

"The more they can do the better," Magee said. "As far as I know, we're the only club in our area that specializes in performing arts. We use it to teach leadership, to teach citizenship, and of course, to teach public speaking."

Magee said older kids take turns working as a director.

"It's been a good challenge for them to learn how to keep people on task in a positive way and not be bossy."

The club recently decided to incorporate Spanish in a performance of "The Gingerbread Boy" and a puppet show of "The Little Red Hen."

"A good way to teach Spanish is to take a familiar story and substitute Spanish words as the play goes along," Magee said.

The Harbor Lights kids performed at a variety of venues, including the after-school program at La Casita de Georgetown, a community center for Hispanics.

"I was a little nervous because the kids at La Casita are used to hearing fluent Spanish-speakers all the time," she said. "But I think it was very positive."

Sandy Reynolds, who has been involved in 4-H for more than 30 years, leads a line dance group in Dover called Kent County Kickerz.

"It's good aerobic exercise and the kids don't even realize they're exercising because they're having fun," she said.

Reynolds has lead 4-H clubs in Dover for more than 15 years and said more programs exist in the region than ever before.

"It's a necessary trend," she said. We have a large number of children who do not live out in the country. If a child has an interest in anything, we will do our best to find a project area for them."

Pat Sullivan, of Harrington, said specialty 4-H groups are becoming more popular because kids are so busy that they prefer to spend time on one area of interest.

Sullivan leads a traditional 4-H club in Harrington with his wife, Linda, but he also started Kent County Archery. Youth in the club range from 8 to 18 years of age and include archers of all ability levels. Sullivan said one child with severe childhood arthritis learned how to shoot targets and now looks forward to coming each month.

"A lot of people think of 4-H like" they think of Future Farmers of America, he said. "They think animals or sewing. Really the biggest thing the kids get out of 4-H is public speaking and leadership. If you listen to a group of kids do presentations, you can tell which ones have been in 4-H."

Reynolds also said 4-H is about teaching life skills to youth.

"Anything that they learn with other people in this type of program is going to point them in the right direction," she said. "They're getting the good attention they need."

FYI

Some specialty 4-H clubs in Delaware

For details, call 4-H at 831-8965, 730-4000, 856-7303.

Archery (throughout Sussex)

Bunny Busters (throughout Sussex)

Clowning Around, Smyrna

Cow Pals, Newark (ages 5-7, and focused only on cows)

East Coast Riding Club (only horses, throughout Sussex)

Future Discovery Team, Newark (homeschoolers)

Guiding Paws, Newark (Seeing-eye dogs)

Harbor Lights Club, Lincoln (performing arts)

Heavenly Hooves, Middletown (only horses)

Kent County Archery, Harrington

Kent County Kickerz, Dover (line dancing)

Personal Ponies, Pike Creek (therapeutic riding for handicapped children)

Robotics (throughout Sussex)

Sewing Club, Newark

Sheep Club, Newark

Woodworking Club, Newarkphoto



Jarrett Cook desire to be a clown helped inspire Clowing Around 4-H.

News Journal file



At a Clowing Around 4-H Club meeting Jon McIntosh and his mother, Renate, the club's co-founder, choose balloons to make animals.

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