

Joy Sparks Spirit of 4-H Award presented to Carlene Jones

11:20 a.m., Oct. 21, 2009----Carlene Jones, organizational leader of the Lord Baltimore Helping Hands 4-H Club, was presented the inaugural Joy Sparks Spirit of 4-H Award Sept. 26 during the Sussex County 4-H Achievement and Recognition Night, which had as its theme "Celebrating the Sparks of 4-H."

The award was presented by Donald Sparks, S. Hallock du Pont Chair of Plant and Soil Sciences and director of the Delaware Environmental Institute at the University of Delaware, and Mark Manno, Delaware 4-H interim state coordinator.

The Joy Sparks Spirit of 4-H Award recognizes outstanding individuals who exhibit enthusiasm, dedication and exemplify 4-H spirit and values. The award is named in memory of 4-H state project leader Joy Sparks, who died Feb. 17, 2009.

The 2009 recipient, Jones, has been a Sussex 4-H Leader for 49 years. She and her family reside in Frankford, Del.

"My dream is and has always been to help that one 4-H'er," Jones said. This quote has been heard through the years by 4-H agents and Sussex 4-H family. Of course, about 1000 young people have been helped at the local club level by Jones and countless other Sussex County 4-H members have benefited from her help.

Each year all her club members turn in a project record, said Mary Argo, Sussex County 4-H educator, who had nothing but praise for Jones' dedication. The Lord Baltimore books and leader reports are always the first group to arrive in the 4-H office. "When demonstrations or public speaking contests arrive, if there is a club member participating, Ms. Carlene is there to cheer them on," Argo said.

Through the years Jones has served as an officer of the Sussex Leaders' Association and served on many committees and helped with 4-H events and activities.

Even when away from Delaware, Jones contacts the 4-H office and requests that the *Sussex Connections* newsletter and 4-H mail be sent to her because she does not want to miss any important 4-H happenings, Argo said. She is sure to return Sussex County around the time of the annual clothing and textile judging contest, for which Jones has served as judging monitor for the past 14 years.

In Jones' 49 years as a volunteer 4-H leader, there have been many changes in Delaware 4-H. Jones said she can recall each of them, and she has embraced and accepted each change. She greets everyone with a smile, a hug for some, and will share a funny story or two.

Jones calls 4-H agents "boss" and Joy Sparks was "the boss." Jones' great works have not gone unnoticed. Prior to receiving the Sparks Award, Jones was a nominee for the Governors Volunteer of the year Award, and Sussex County Salute to Excellence Lifetime 4-H Volunteer Award.

She is a member of the Sussex Order of Links, the alumni association for adult and graduate 4-H'ers and leaders. To be nominated as a Link is one of 4-H's highest honors.

Her 4-H spirit also flows out to her community and church, in keeping with the 4-H pledge which states in part to commit Head, Heart, Hands and Health to one's club, community, country and world.

4-H is a community of young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship and life skills under the guidance of caring supportive adults. It is part of University of Delaware Cooperative Extension.



Mark Manno, left, looks on as Donald Sparks presents a surprised Carlene Jones as Sussex County's first recipient of the Joy Sparks Spirit of 4-H Award. Jones is beginning her 50th year of volunteering this September.

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105 East Main Street
University of Delaware
Newark, DE 19716 • USA
Phone: (302) 831-2792
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For more information about 4-H or to volunteer as an adult leader, contact Mary Argo at (302) 856-2585 ext 559 or visit the Sussex County Cooperative Extension and Research Web site.

Photo by Roseann Ferri