The Alabama 4-H Wall of Fame

March 19, 2013

The W. Gaines Smith Environmental Science Education Building

Alabama 4-H Center
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The Alabama 4-H Wall of Fame recognizes individuals and organizations that have had a significant impact on the 4-H and Youth Development program and its members and leaders. The Alabama 4-H Club Foundation, Inc. and Alabama 4-H honors, remembers and pays tribute to those who have influenced the lives of Alabama youth by their commitment “To Make the Best Better.”

Master of Ceremonies
Margaret Lawrence
Specialist, Communications & Marketing
Alabama Cooperative Extension System

Welcome
Dan Presley
Chairman, Alabama 4-H Club Foundation, Inc.

Recognition of Inductees
James Langcuster
Specialist, Communications & Marketing
Alabama Cooperative Extension System

Closing Remarks
Dr. Lamar Nichols
Assistant Director, 4-H and Youth Development
Alabama Cooperative Extension System
Auburn University Athletics

Partner

Auburn University Athletics’ commitment to Alabama 4-H youth has provided thousands of Alabama youngsters an often unlooked and much-needed opportunity to experience a college game-day atmosphere, see a collegiate athletic game and think about being a part of it one day.

For the past five years, Auburn Athletics Marketing has partnered with Alabama 4-H and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System to provide youth complimentary tickets to football and basketball games. While these events center on athletics, youth take away experiences that can remain with them a lifetime.

AU Athletics’ generosity is much more than a ticket—it provides youth the ability to leave their community and county (some for the first time) and experience a campus atmosphere during one of its most exciting times—an athletic event.

The great reward for the day is seeing a child’s face light up as they step off a bus onto campus, eager to soak up all the experiences.

In the fall of 2012, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M and Auburn University) took advantage of the Auburn Tigers playing Alabama A&M University Bulldogs to offer Extension Youth Day. In addition to educational exhibits, admission officers from both universities and celebrity athletes, the two universities were recognized for its joint mission of Extension by highlighting its youth development programs—Urban Affairs and New Nontraditional Programs at AAMU, and Alabama 4-H and Youth Development and Operation Military Kids: Alabama at Auburn.

“The football teams meeting was a great opportunity to celebrate the education programs ACES delivers through both universities working for the betterment of Alabamians,” says Director Gary Lemme.

These events provided by AU Athletics are something that cannot be underestimated in the life of a child because the experience allows them to see first-hand and dream of what they can achieve.

Nominated by: Alabama 4-H
Gay Glidewell Barnes
St. Clair 4-H Alumna and Alabama Teacher of the Year

Gay Glidewell Barnes credits her foundation in Alabama 4-H as the reason she is a teacher. As Alabama’s Teacher of the Year for 2012 and one of four finalists for National Teacher of the Year, Barnes experiences in 4-H—from competitions, meetings, traveling and being a camp counselor at 4-H Summer Camp—shaped her to be the educator she is today.

“When you are in 4-H, you never really think how you will use what you learn,” she says. “But now, as an adult, when I’m doing something, I realize I learned that because of 4-H.

“4-H is multifaceted and the whole promise of service to community is not something I truly understood the impact it made on me until I was an adult,” she says. Looking back, I see the impact 4-H made on my life; the choices I’ve made in my life were because of my 4-H experiences.

“The question I ask myself now, that I know is grounded in my 4-H experience, is ‘How is my presence going to make the work better?’” Barnes says. “As a youngster I’m not sure I completely understood the 4-H motto, but through my 4-H experience, and as an adult, I now know what the 4-H pledge means today.

“My experiences in 4-H play into my feelings as a classroom teacher because it is important for me to get it right every day for those children,” she adds. “Our actions impact not just our life, but the lives of the children we teach, and that is a huge responsibility and undertaking.

“I teach because I believe it is important that we have a population of children who will be able to think, and 4-H taught me to think beyond my community.”

Barnes says 4-H was a huge part of her childhood growing up in rural St. Clair County. “I can’t image what I would have done without it,” says Barnes, a 4-H’er from fifth grade until she turned 19 years old. “I had so many opportunities as a 4-H’er that my family could not afford,” she says.

Gay Barnes currently teaches in the Madison City School System.

Nominated by Janet McCoy, Development Program Coordinator

Inductees continued

Annette Mehurg Wardrup
Milton Williams*
Milton A. “Buzz” Wendland
Ronny Williams*
Bob Whittenburg
Sue Wills
Tommy & Carol Williams
Beverly Mays Young

*deceased
^National 4-H Hall of Fame

18 U.S.C. 707
Rex Blackburn

Butler County 4-H Alumnus

The 4-H pledge learned by Rex Blackburn as a young boy growing up on a rural farm with no electricity or indoor plumbing in the 1940s continues to follow him today.

“My friends and I could hardly wait to be old enough to join the 4-H club,” says Rex Blackburn. “I can still remember the thrill of winning a blue ribbon and the honor of standing before my classmates. I raised chickens, pigs, calves and produce as 4-H projects, but these projects also helped to feed my family.”

“It has been more than 60 years since I first learned the 4-H pledge,” says Blackburn, “as a 10-year-old boy at Starlington School in Georgiana. 4-H instilled values in me that make for better living and citizenship.”

“As stated in the 4-H Pledge, I’ve tried to use my head in making good decision for myself, my family and my community. Serving as a steward in my church, I also served on the grounds and finance commitment. Clear thinking is imperative in making sound decisions.”

Blackburn says that loyalty is part of a person’s character. He served in the U.S. Army from 1964 to 1970. After college, he returned to Butler County working for General Telephone. He and his wife, Mary Ellen, have been married for 45 years.

Besides service in his church, Blackburn is a member of the volunteer fire department, and his large vegetable garden provides fresh produce for older people in his community.

Healthy living includes giving back. Blackburn has a small catfish pond for children and grandchildren to visit and fish. “I’ve tried to pass on to my children and grandchildren many of the ideas and skills that I learned through 4-H club,” says Blackburn.

Ralph Thompson states, “I don’t know of anyone who gets as much enjoyment in helping other people as Rex does. He is a 4-H member who continues to use the values he learned in everything he does today.”

Nominated by Ralph Thompson, Extension employee (retired)
Eric and Louise Cates Jr.
Butler County 4-H Volunteers

Eric and Louise Cates Jr. are longtime outstanding leaders in Extension and 4-H programs. They are recognized as leaders in Butler County and their community at large. They were always willing to serve on committees in 4-H and Extension for more than 22 years.

As manager of ASCS in Butler County, Eric became involved in 4-H fundraising. Louise came to the Extension office almost weekly to assist with programs. She was active in the Home Demonstration Council and her local club. Their four children were active in 4-H. Two of the children, Jean and Eric III, were 4-H state winners and attended National 4-H Congress in Chicago.

Ralph Thompson states, “In my 22 years in Butler County, we had more than 60 state 4-H winners. We could not have been this successful without outstanding volunteer leaders. The Cates family was tops when it came to leaders in our 4-H program.

“In my years as 4-H agent, more than 95 percent of the businesses were sponsors of our 4-H program,” says Thompson. “Eric Cates involvement for more than 50 years in the Greenville Kiwanis Club helped with getting that funding.”

The Cates family are members of the First United Methodist Church in Fort Deposit. Eric served as chairman of the board, lay speaker and was a Sunday school teacher for many years. Louise was active in the women’s program at the church.

“A couple from Greenville was at my house recently,” says Thompson. “They said ‘when you think of the Cates family, you think of 4-H and Extension.’”

Nominated by Ralph Thompson, Extension employee (retired)
Shaun Winn
Calhoun 4-H Volunteer

During the 1990s, when you walked into the Alexandria fifth grade hall on 4-H Day, you knew something was up! The students were excited, there were 4-H contest entries on the counter in every classroom and there was usually the smell of food, especially on Egg Demonstration days. In the midst of all the 4-H excitement was Shaun Winn, the fifth grade science teacher.

During her 14 years as a 4-H volunteer, Shaun Winn inspired the students to be active in 4-H meetings, contests and leadership opportunities. Every fall, Winn and the other fifth-grade teachers would encourage students to campaign and vote for 4-H officers. Before the first 4-H meeting, officers were trained by Winn, and then held to a high standard during the 4-H meetings. They were also encouraged to attend the County 4-H Council meetings and report back to the local club.

After the monthly 4-H meeting, Winn would review the upcoming contest rules with the 4-H member in all five local clubs. If someone was talented in art, she encouraged them to enter the poster contest. A good speaker was encouraged to enter public speaking or one of the demonstrations. A quiet child might be encouraged to enter photography. She talked about how much fun the food contests were: Chicken-Que, baked foods, dairy foods, egg and beef. It was not uncommon for Winn and her helpers to judge 100 to 150 entries at each monthly meeting—many of them food entries.

When her students became high school seniors, she asked them what they remembered about fifth grade. The majority of them had very fond memories of 4-H and the skills they learned through it. Winn worked with approximately 2,100 youth in the 4-H program, and she expected all of them to do their best.

Shaun Winn and her 4-H clubs were recognized as Club of the Year at least seven times during her 14 years as leader. This award indicated local participation, outstanding officers, club behavior and involvement in the county 4-H program. The president of the winning 4-H club and Winn represented the Calhoun County 4-H program at the sponsor luncheon each year to thank the Rotary Club for their support.

Ruth Sarro, regional Extension agent, who worked with Shaun Winn during that time, recalled introducing herself as a 4-H agent to an Alexandria Elementary administrator. “I don’t know what you do in 4-H, but I know what Shaun Winn does in 4-H,” the staff member responded. The entire community knew the value of 4-H through her efforts.

Nominated by Ruth Sarro, Regional Extension Agent

Curtis and Susie Franklin*
Calhoun County 4-H Volunteers

Curtis and Susie Franklin served Calhoun County and surrounding counties youth for many years through volunteer work at Coosa Valley Youth Services (CVYS).

The Franklins learned and loved gardening from their parents and grandparents. In 1994, they came into the Calhoun County Extension office inquiring about volunteering. Calhoun County Extension Coordinator David West had just begun a Master Gardener program, and CVYS had inquired about a horticulture therapy program for their youth.

After completing the Master Gardener class, the Franklins helped West develop and begin the Tree Amigos 4-H Group at CVYS.

In 2005, CVYS received a grant to help the cadets of the Camp Lewis (now Lewis Academy), the residential facility, achieve employability skills. Susie taught the young men how to be more successful through proper etiquette training. The cadets enjoyed the class and learned more than they expected.

The Tree Amigos program has won local, national and international awards. The current program was estimated to have an economic impact of more than $1 million each year. The impact on each young person and the community is immeasurable.

Susie served until the time of her death as secretary and coordinator of the Tree Amigos 4-H program.

Both Curtis and Susie served as judges for many 4-H programs. Curtis’ favorite contest to judge was Chicken-Que and Susie’s was anything where the 4-H’ers used their creativity.

The youth and staff at CVYS all considered the Franklins their adopted grandparents. They looked forward to Wednesday when they would arrive for their classes. After their deaths, a tree was planted in memory of the Franklins and the classroom at the CVYS Attention Home was named after them. CVYS thought this was the most fitting way to honor such special people for their contributions to the youth around Calhoun County and the surrounding areas.

Nominated by Tiffany Moore, Randolph County Extension Coordinator

*Deceased
Henry and Kathy Gotcher
Colbert County 4-H Volunteers

Henry and Kathy Gotcher are lifelong residents of Colbert County and have deep roots in 4-H and agriculture. The Gotchers have remained true to their roots and have continued many of the traditions with their family farm and 4-H.

For more than 15 years, they have been supporters of the Colbert County 4-H program as parents of 4-H'ers, as well as 4-H volunteers. The Gotchers sons, Will, Ben and currently Marc, have been and continue to be successful members with the Colbert County program. Both Will and Ben have won first place in the state lawn tractor competition and attended the national competition at Purdue University.

The Gotcher family has exemplified honesty, hard work and loyalty to family and friends. Kathy’s career with USDA and NRCS has allowed her to work closely with farmers and ranchers in Colbert County. Henry’s career with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System as a former 4-H county agent and with Wise Alloys has allowed him to teach and instill a strong work ethic in his sons.

The Gotchers’ servant leadership and unconditional support of the Colbert County 4-H program has been instrumental to the success of the Colbert County 4-H program. Henry and Kathy are former 4-H’ers and believe in the core values of 4-H and have wanted their children and others to experience the goodness of 4-H.

They have served in many different capacities: committee members, judges, chaperons, financial support for Colbert County 4-H, and being involved in activities such as the 4-H Centennial Parade and 4-H Round-Up. The Gotchers, along with their sons, have participated in and attended regional and state 4-H activities including being on the 4-H Regional Advisory Committee, served as officers for the 4-H Regional team, Regional and State 4-H Congress, and acted on Senior Leadership team.

The Gotchers were named the 2012 Farm Family of the Year at the Colbert County Farm-City Banquet. This is the highest award given by the Colbert County Extension office and the Farm City Committee. Their impact on agriculture, Colbert County 4-H and their community will be felt for many years. Their legacy will be remembered by the impact their children have had on the 4-H program and how they have modeled after their parents.

Nominated by Danny McWilliams, Colbert County Extension Coordinator

Helen Tibbs Wilson
Jefferson County Extension Agent (retired) and 4-H Alumna

Before the age of 9, Helen Tibbs Wilson knew she wanted to be a part of Alabama 4-H. It was the local Home Demonstration Club that caught her attention. At this time, Extension was two separate programs - one state office was housed at Tuskegee Institute and one was at Alabama Polytechnic Institute.

Wilson participated in 4-H at Toney Junior High School in Madison County. She won first place in the state 4-H fashion revue held at Tuskegee. Her outfit was a black corduroy skirt with a reversible vest of black corduroy and black-and-white check fabric. She won a trip to Washington, D.C., where she won second place nationally.

Wilson also won a first place state award in food preservation. Wilson’s family grew a lot of their own produce, and she loved to preserve the fresh fruits and vegetables. She often gave demonstrations to the local Home Demonstration Club.

In addition to her 4-H project participation, Wilson attended 4-H camp that was also held in Tuskegee. She attended camp for eight years, serving as a camp counselor for three years.

It was her participation in 4-H that influenced Wilson to attend Alabama A&M University and pursue a career as a home demonstration agent. She graduated in 1959 with a degree in home economics education. Her first job was in Conecuh County, where she encouraged her 4-H club members and had state 4-H winners at Tuskegee in fashion revue, yeast breads and public speaking.

Wilson moved to Jefferson County where she taught home economics at Alden High School and served as a 4-H volunteer. Her next job would bring her back to Extension as an agent working with the 4-H DOT (Diet’s Our Thing) program in Jefferson County. Wilson was able to work with program assistants, urban 4-H and youth at risk at schools and community centers. She continued her career for 23 years, retiring as a county Extension agent in 1995.

Since her retirement, Wilson continues to promote the values of 4-H. She has judged 4-H events at the county level and participated in the County Awards Banquet. She never gives up the opportunity to tell others how much 4-H offers. For 66 years, Helen Tibbs Wilson has been a part of the world’s largest youth organization.

Nominated by Joann Smith Wissinger, Jefferson County Extension Coordinator
Janet Borden Griffin  
Colbert County 4-H Volunteer and 4-H Alumna

Janet Borden Griffin is a trustworthy and hard-working individual who has the ability to relate to people of different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Through her involvement with the 4-H club program, she has exemplified leadership and citizenship skills in her daily job activities.

Griffin is a 4-H alumna who also served as an in-school 4-H club leader and volunteer for more than 16 years in Colbert County. During her early years as a 4-H’er, she was actively involved in several projects such as fashion revue, public speaking, food preservation, food demonstrations, bread exhibits and gardening. After high school graduation, she would often conduct food demonstrations and food preservation classes for the younger 4-H’ers in the Franklin County 4-H program.

For four years, Griffin served as 4-H club leader at New Bethel Elementary School in Tuscumbia, where she motivated and encouraged her students to participate in 4-H projects at the local, county and regional levels. She often incorporated 4-H projects with her classroom lesson plans under the Alabama Course of Study. Griffin would have the majority of the 4-H’ers who participated in the Colbert County 4-H Round-Up and at other county programs, events and activities. Griffin went the extra mile by taking a personal leave day each year to transport some of her 4-H club participants to the County 4-H Round-Up competitive event.

Currently, Griffin serves as a 4-H volunteer for the Colbert County 4-H Club and is a member of the Northwest Regional 4-H Advisory Council. She also continues to volunteer her time and service as a resource volunteer assisting with events such as North Alabama Regional 4-H Congress, NW Region 4-H Educational Tour, Colbert County Farm-City program and other programs, events and activities.

Griffin received Colbert County 4-H Club Leader Award for three years in a row. Her club received the Colbert County 4-H Club of the Year Award during that same time.

Griffin’s two sons, Kalon and Garrett Borden, were involved in the Colbert program. Some of the students she taught in 4-H are today productive citizens in society as teachers, doctors, politicians, accountants, firefighters and police officers. Their achievements come, in large measure, from her support, motivation and encouragement.

Nominated by Marian Beck, Regional Extension Agent

Martha “Marti” Warren  
Calhoun County 4-H Volunteer and 4-H Alumna

When you mention 4-H, Marti Warren’s face lights up and she says, “Let me tell you about my trip to National 4-H Congress….” A Tennessee 4-H alumna, she rode the train to Chicago to compete in the national dairy food competition. For her dairy demonstration, she used cottage cheese with four rings of bell pepper that represented the 4-H four-leaf clover. She also competed in dress making and decorating in which she decorated her bedroom using curtains and a bedspread. Warren credits 4-H with helping her become the person she is today.

For the past 30 years, Warren has judged 4-H contests and assisted the Calhoun County 4-H program. She serves on the team to interview regional council members who want to be on the State 4-H Council, and she has many helpful tips to share with 4-H’ers. After the contest or the council interviews, she will take time to visit with the participants to give feedback and encouragement. She spent hours preparing and taping music when song leaders needed music to use during 4-H club meetings.

Warren has been recognized by many local, county and state organizations. She was first runner-up in Ms. Senior Alabama of America in 1997. She was given the Outstanding Individual of the Year Award by Alabama’s governor for her work with people with disabilities. The East Alabama Cerebral Palsy Center gave her the Life Achievement Award.

Marti Warren enjoys interacting with children and encouraging them to reach for the stars. Regional Extension Agent Ruth Sarro says, “Marti is the kind of person you want every 4-H’er to grow up to be—patriotic, generous, kind and always willing to help.”

Nominated by Ruth Sarro, Regional Extension Agent
Robert and Joy Herring
Mobile County 4-H Volunteers

Seldom do you find a couple who ask “what can we do for 4-H, rather than what can 4-H do for me and my children?” Robert and Joy Herring have served as 4-H volunteers for the past 10 years and have been faithful to do more than their part.

The Herrings have spent many long nights chaperoning 4-H’ers at the 4-H Center, always with a firm hand and a loving heart. They have served as judges for the 4-H Competitive Events from local to state level. They have been the backbone of the 4-H exhibit booths at the Greater Gulf State Fair.

They have led countless Classroom in the Forest: Forest in the Classroom™ presentations both in the classroom and in the field. They will forget more than most of us will ever learn about nature and life lessons from our vast natural resources. They truly make the forest come alive with intriguing stories that will be repeated for years to come. They make the best better.

Joy is an educator at McDavid Jones Elementary School and organizes 4-H parent volunteers to lead 4-H clubs in every classroom for more than 1,000 children. Walk the halls of McDavid Jones Elementary School on the first Friday of the month and you will find children excited about learning and volunteers fully engaged with hands-on learning activities. The Clover Bud program focuses on cooperative learning and age appropriate activities. You will hear children repeating the 4-H pledge and learning to be concerned about the welfare of others.

In the Wildcat Junior 4-H Club, you will hear children reciting the 4-H pledge and conducting 4-H club meetings using parliamentary procedure to conduct the business part of the meeting. Children are learning how to think and developing creative thinking skills, thus giving them a chance to make decisions on their own. They are learning how to make wise choices and use their time wisely.

In Mobile County, children are being prepared to become good citizens and make wise choices. Robert and Joy Herring are one of those couples who changes lives and make a significant impact on their community through 4-H.

Nominated by Jane Hartselle, Regional Extension Agent

John Ussery
Partner with County and Regional 4-H

John Ussery was instrumental in contributing to 4-H throughout his career with the Wiregrass Electric from 1956 through 2004.

In the early part of his career, he made photographs at 4-H events including cooking competitions, calf shows and demonstrations. He shared these photos with the 4-H groups as well as publishing them in the Wiregrass Electric magazine and newsletters. He was a supporter of the 4-H public speaking contests throughout the area, encouraging other electric cooperatives to participate and sponsor as well.

Throughout the 1990s, Ussery was chairman of the Alabama Cooperative Youth Conference held at the Alabama 4-H Center held in Columbiana. This was a combined effort of cooperatives throughout the state with Alabama 4-H.

“It is time we honored Mr. Ussery,” states Willie Durr, Houston County Extension coordinator. “He was very heavily involved in the 4-H public speaking events, Alabama 4-H Amp Camp and the Youth Cooperative Conference during his professional career. Mr. Ussery worked at the Wiregrass Electric Cooperative in Hartford as members representative and was very involved with the Troy 4-H District Round-Up.”

Ussery’s career impacted other areas of the community as well as 4-H. He was active in the Greater Geneva County Chamber of Commerce and the Dothan Area Chamber of Commerce. He served on the board and as past-treasurer on the Enterprise, Coffee, Geneva County Economic Development Corporation; was a member of the board and past-president of the Southeast Alabama Council for Economic Development; is also a member of the board and past-president of the National Peanut Festival, and currently serves as first vice-preside of the Alabama Fair board of directors.

Before his retirement, Ussery received the Jack Jenkins Cooperative Employee Citizenship Award in 2003 presented by the Alabama Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Nominated by Cary Hatcher, Wiregrass Electric Cooperative
Eunice Paige Tibbs
Limestone County Extension Agent (retired)
and 4-H Alumna

Eunice Paige Tibbs was born and raised in Huntsville. She attended Indian Creek Elementary School and Council Senior High School. She graduated in 1973 from Alabama A&M University with a B.S. in home economics education and received an M.S. in 1989.

Tibbs was employed by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and served 26 years working with youth and adults in the areas of 4-H and Youth Development and Family and Consumer Sciences in Crenshaw, Marshall and Limestone counties. She reached more than 50,000 youth and adults through programs, events and activities, providing the opportunity for them to have a better quality of life.

She was a 4-H member in Madison County. She participated in several projects such as fashion revue and food demonstrations. As a county Extension agent, she often reflected back on her youthful days in 4-H and would realize the importance of an impact that 4-H could have on an individual’s life. She spent her career making a difference in the lives of others.

Tibbs served as a county Extension agent in Crenshaw County from 1973 to 1976, and worked in Marshall County from 1976 to 1990 reaching more youth and adults through Extension programs. She transferred to Limestone County in 1990 and remained there until her retirement in 1999.

She developed programs in the areas of 4-H and Youth Development and Family and Consumer Sciences to meet the challenging needs of youth and adults regardless of their socio-economic status. She also was instrumental in helping youth and adults achieve their goals to become productive citizens who would give back to their communities through service projects.

Tibbs conducted educational and enrichment programs to youth ages 9 to 18 years old in the In-School 4-H Club programs on an annual basis. She dedicated her time, expertise and service working with youth getting them prepared to compete at the district and state level competitive events.

Tibbs has seen many of the youth whom she worked with and mentored developed into capable, caring adults who have made an impact on their communities by providing their expertise in educational programs to meet the needs of future generations.

Nominated by Marian Beck, Regional Extension Agent

James David and Joan Malone
Mobile County 4-H Volunteers

James David Malone is the executive director of Alabama TREASURE Forest Association and Joan Malone is the program coordinator. These two are the inspiration of Classroom in the Forest: Forest in the Classroom™. They were the first volunteer team to host children at their Heritage Forest more than 18 years ago.

More children today have less contact with the natural world, and this is having a huge impact on their health and development. With literally thousands of children on the ground at Malone Heritage Forest, learning about the importance of private forest landowners and their role in the conservation of our forest natural resources, the Malones are making a difference. They encourage children to remember the past and plan for the future through wise decision making skills—life skills that make the best better.

A trip to Malone Heritage Forest in Chunchula, Ala. is like taking a stroll through living history. There is a replica of the old home place that allows children and adults to see how life was before all the luxuries of today with electricity. James David teaches living history, math, science and stewardship from the smoke house, to the horse-powered sugar cane mill, to the spring house.

Joan guides the guests through the life of a woman of the house in old days. She begins with the iron wash pot over an open fire and tells of days of cooking with wood.

On the walking trail, children learn about the day in and day out of wise management of the forest natural resources. Children can be creative and experience their world through educational, hands-on education. Children learn to recognize the importance of science as it relates to our forest natural resources and the importance of our forest natural resources in everyday life.

James David and Joan love the land and the history of land ownership, and it shows with each group that walks through their forest land and Heritage Home. It is a unique experience. Children are given the opportunity to get back to nature, seek solitude, enjoy the great outdoors, learn the many important lessons that the forest teaches and learn to become better stewards of the land.

Nominated by Jane Hartselle, Regional Extension Agent
Ralph Thompson
Baldwin County Extension Coordinator (retired)

Ralph Thompson began working in Butler County as a 4-H agent in 1954. While he was in Butler County, he recruited 80 percent of the schools to participate in the 4-H program. There were 4-H members from rural areas and the city.

“He touched lives and opened doors for the young people,” stated Rex Blackburn, a 4-H alumnus.

There were many educational opportunities for 4-H members that gave them a better quality of life. He encouraged them to keep good records and some won trips to National 4-H Congress in Chicago for their hard work.

Thompson coordinated several livestock programs. There was a pig chain, dairy, beef cattle and chick programs. The chickens were donated from Alabama Power, and 4-H'ers in different communities received them. At fair time, these 4-H members could enter six pullets in the County Fair to be judged. First prize at the fair provided money that often would pay for chicken feed for a month.

J. Paul Till, another 4-H alumnus, says, “Mr. Thompson was always pushing, encouraging and recruiting me for various 4-H projects and programs. Because of him, I entered and won awards in such things as the safety program, livestock judging and public speaking.

“Perhaps more importantly, he gave me more encouragement that I ever received at home and filled a void of support that was lacking for me, a shy, reserved farm boy from a small agricultural community in South Alabama.”

Thompson was successful in securing sponsors for the 4-H program and worked with sponsors to recognize 4-H members for their accomplishments. There were watches donated and presented at the Annual County-Wide 4-H Rally to the outstanding 4-H members. Scholarships for 4-H Camp were available. Thompson also made sure that if 4-H members won a trip to state or to national that they had the things they needed for the event or contest.

In 1976, Thompson came to Baldwin County as the county Extension coordinator. He continued to recruit sponsors for the 4-H program that provided more opportunities for young people in Baldwin County. Thompson retired in 1984 and continues to be supportive of 4-H.

Nominated by Susan Wingard, Baldwin County Extension Coordinator

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Eric Massey*
Lauderdale County 4-H Shooting Sports Volunteer

Lauderdale County lost a valuable volunteer and mentor with the passing of Eric Massey this past December.

Massey was instrumental in starting the shooting sports program in Lauderdale County in the spring of 2003. He attended 4-H’s shooting sports instructor training at the Alabama 4-H Center in December 2003 and remained active in the shooting sports program.

In 2005, to meet the needs of Lauderdale County youth, Massey attended instructor training with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources so that he could teach the hunter safety course. He continued his commitment with additional 4-H volunteer training in 2005.

Massey was named Lauderdale County’s Volunteer of the Month in March 2008. He continued his volunteerism even as he battled cancer over the next 4 years.

An avid skeet shooter himself, Massey shot competitively since 1988. He loved working with youth because “they are eager to learn shooting sports activities.” He brought that expertise and enthusiasm to more than 550 Lauderdale County 4-H members through monthly 4-H Shooting Sports programs, an outdoor sports activity day and hunter safety classes.

Massey took teams to the state competition every year beginning in 2004. Those teams placed at the top level of these events. Brian Matthews, whose sons have been shooting with 4-H for four years, expressed well what many who knew Massey feel: “I really admire the dedication he had to all the kids. He took a lot of time and drove a lot of miles with these children. His dedication is rare and will be truly missed.”

“He had a true talent and love for shooting,” said Massey’s sister Teresa Young, whose son, Russell, participates in 4-H. “It is great to know he passes this on to a wonderful group of young people.”

Nominated by Lauderdale County Extension

*Deceased

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Ralph Thompson
Baldwin County Extension Coordinator (retired)

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There were many educational opportunities for 4-H members that gave them a better quality of life. He encouraged them to keep good records and some won trips to National 4-H Congress in Chicago for their hard work.

Thompson coordinated several livestock programs. There was a pig chain, dairy, beef cattle and chick programs. The chickens were donated from Alabama Power, and 4-H’ers in different communities received them. At fair time, these 4-H members could enter six pullets in the County Fair to be judged. First prize at the fair provided money that often would pay for chicken feed for a month.

J. Paul Till, another 4-H alumnus, says, “Mr. Thompson was always pushing, encouraging and recruiting me for various 4-H projects and programs. Because of him, I entered and won awards in such things as the safety program, livestock judging and public speaking.

“Perhaps more importantly, he gave me more encouragement that I ever received at home and filled a void of support that was lacking for me, a shy, reserved farm boy from a small agricultural community in South Alabama.”

Thompson was successful in securing sponsors for the 4-H program and worked with sponsors to recognize 4-H members for their accomplishments. There were watches donated and presented at the Annual County-Wide 4-H Rally to the outstanding 4-H members. Scholarships for 4-H Camp were available. Thompson also made sure that if 4-H members won a trip to state or to national that they had the things they needed for the event or contest.

In 1976, Thompson came to Baldwin County as the county Extension coordinator. He continued to recruit sponsors for the 4-H program that provided more opportunities for young people in Baldwin County. Thompson retired in 1984 and continues to be supportive of 4-H.

Nominated by Susan Wingard, Baldwin County Extension Coordinator

*Deceased
Mildred Stephenson  
*Morgan County 4-H Alumna*

Mildred Morris Stephenson remembers her 4-H projects fondly—cooking, canning and sewing. Her favorite memory? The friendships she made with other young people from around Alabama.

The Hartselle resident, who celebrated her 100th birthday in December 2012, says 4-H was a significant part of her life growing up in the north Alabama community of Danville, near Hartselle. She was a 4-H’er in the mid to late 1920s.

“My earliest memories of 4-H are meeting with other girls, playing games and lesson of some sort,” Stephenson said. “4-H was a joy in my life.”

It was because of 4-H that Stephenson traveled outside her home county for the first time. “We went to Auburn, and I was one of two chosen to attend a camp or meeting,” she said. “We went by train, and I was 14 years old. It was in 1926.”

“We had so much fun attending classes, playing games and having deviations. We had programs on developing women to become better homemakers. When we left Auburn, we were much wiser.”

And while the technology of today wasn’t available in Stephenson’s youth, she remarkably kept a pen-pal friendship with an Australian girl for more than 38 years. “She was from Bucklebook, Australia, and we wrote each other at Christmas and on holidays.”

The skills Stephenson learned in 4-H were put to good use when she married in 1931. “Those were the depression times, and she canned and sewed for her family,” said Ginger Nolen, one of two children by Stephenson and her late husband, Bill. Her son died in 1998. “She made all her clothes and all our clothes, and she taught me and other family members to sew as well.”

As a mother, Stephenson encouraged both of her children to be involved in 4-H, and she often volunteered to help with programs. She was also involved with the Hopewell Homemaker’s Club in the Hartselle area, serving the organization for more than 60 years. She also served as church librarian at West Hartselle Baptist Church for 35 years, and the church honored her by naming the library in her name.

Several of her grandchildren have been involved in Alabama 4-H, winning awards for sewing and other projects. Her love of 4-H has been felt by her children, grandchildren and countless others she mentored through her life.

Nominated by Morgan County Extension

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Clarence McDaniel  
*Retired Limestone County Extension and District Extension Agent*

In the mid-1950s, Clarence McDaniel was hired by Extension at Auburn University as a county agent in Limestone County. Wearing many program hats, his delight was working with the 4-H program. In the early years, he established 4-H clubs in many church schools.

Mr. Mac, as he was called, eventually organized 4-H clubs in all of Limestone County’s schools that educated black students. His work covered many activities including animal science, forestry, agronomy, camping, competitive activities and much more.

Although it could be said that Mr. Mac touched the lives of many children growing up in Limestone County, what’s even more remarkable is he touched the lives of every black child of 4-H age during his county agent years while serving Limestone County. He harnessed the synergy of the families to promote and conduct his activities. Much of the funding for 4-H activities was donated by families with some local business sponsorship.

McDaniel was a visionary and foresaw change in technology on the farm. Many younger family members were inheriting farms and selling them. McDaniel convinced his 4-H’ers to keep and work the land. He wanted them to be prepared for what he knew would be a lucrative farming career. With an extensive knowledge of agronomy, McDaniel worked with 4-H’ers to produce better yields by applying his management practices on corn and cotton plots. These increased yields had such an impression on the parents that they began utilizing his methods on their farms. Today, one of Mr. Mac’s 4-H’ers owns one of the largest farming operations in north Alabama, where the family farms thousands of acres.

Later in his career, McDaniel was appointed district director for the Community Resource Development program. He is a charter member of the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service Employees Association and has numerous awards. After a long and productive career of approximately 35 years, McDaniel retired and continues to volunteer with 4-H.

Nominated by Walter Harris, Madison County Extension Coordinator and Jacquelyn Ifill, Madison County Extension Coordinator (retired)
Karen Melson
Morgan County 4H Alumna and Volunteer

Karen Melson has been involved in the Morgan County 4H program for most of her life. She started out as a 4H’er in the fourth grade and was in 4H for 8 years. Melson’s main focus in 4-H was in poultry science and in dairy foods exhibit. During her 4-H years, she placed first in the state Poultry Science. She also won first place for three years in the district dairy foods exhibit. She placed second at the state level for two years and third for another year. She also entered food exhibits in the Morgan County fair and the Northeast Alabama State Fair in Huntsville, winning those competitions several times. Melson began as a 4-H volunteer in 1984.

Melson was the first in Morgan County and in the state to begin a Science, Engineering and Technology 4-H (S.E.T.) club with the Lego Mindstorm robots. After five years, the Morgan County Board of Education took notice of the program, and Melson was instrumental in introducing the Robotics program to the system. This paved the way for seven more S.E.T. 4-H clubs to be started in the middle schools in Morgan County.

Melson combines some of her classroom plans around the 4-H curriculum, from building and programming the robots or building and launching rockets. She even has mini robotics competitive events on her days off.

When it is time for the Morgan County competitive event, she always brings a busload of 4-H’ers. They stay to the end to help put up the chairs and tables that they had helped set up the day before. This shows how much her students love her, and many of these students have competed at the regional and state levels.

Melson received the Achievement in Education Award from the Optimist Club of Decatur for her work with 4H.

Melson has not only donated her time but she donates her resources as well, whether it is a ride to a competitive event or finding and buying a needed item for a project. “My greatest award has been the opportunity give my students the same opportunity I enjoyed being a 4-H’er,” says Melson.

Sharon Fisher, Morgan County 4-H assistant, sums up her feelings: “It has been a joy for me to work and get to know Karen Melson, as she is one of the genuine people on this earth. To her, I owe a debt of gratitude.”

Nominated by Sharon Fisher, Morgan County 4-H Agent Assistant

W. Gaines Smith
Director of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (retired) and 4-H Alumnus

W. Gaines Smith is the only director of the Extension System or its predecessor, The Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, to have worked at every level of Extension in Alabama. A native of Autauga County, he began his career in 1965 as an Extension farm agent in Jefferson County, where he worked with farmers and 4-H club members in many different programs.

He left Jefferson County in 1976 to assume the leadership for Extension efforts in 22 counties in west Alabama. For 14 years, Smith was the guiding hand for county Extension professionals as they provided university-based knowledge on topics ranging from nutrition to conservation tillage to people where they lived and worked.

Beginning in 1990, he served on Extension’s administrative team, first as an associate director, then as interim director and as director for the last four and a half years.

“It has been an honor to lead Extension,” he said. “While I often represented Extension at many events and functions, I am always mindful that I represented the Extension family members—their work, their effort, their commitment and their belief.”

In 2011, the Alabama 4-H Club Foundation, Inc. named the environmental science education building at the Alabama 4-H Center to thank Smith for his commitment to 4-H and Extension.

“I could never have dreamed of this honor when I started my 4-H experience in 1952 as a 4-H member at Hicks Memorial School,” he says. “It’s a long way from there. I am overwhelmed, humbled and very proud of this honor.”

Smith received the Ruby Award from Epsilon Sigma Phi, the national Extension fraternity in 2008. It is the most prestigious recognition presented by ESP and is designed to recognize truly outstanding thinking, performance and leadership in Extension. The recipients are honored for their significant contributions on the state, regional, national and, where applicable, international Extension arena in a variety of ways and in their career.

Smith served on the advisory committee for the National 4-H Council.

“My career spanned times of great change for Cooperative Extension in Alabama,” he says. “I am proud to have worked to make these changes positive, helping Extension grow and serve the citizens of Alabama.”

Nominated by Alabama 4-H
Penny Smith
Mobile County JMG and 4-H Volunteer

“Find a penny, pick it up. All day long you’ll have good luck!” This childhood rhyme comes to mind when you meet Penny Smith. Lucky for us, Miss Penny has been a Mobile County 4-H volunteer for the past 11 years.

For more than a decade, Smith has worked with hundreds of Classroom in the Forest: Forest in the Classroom™ children, led both in school and homeschool 4-H clubs, has been a Master Gardener, and currently serves as the volunteer leader for the Mobile County Junior Master Gardener 4-H club.

Smith is full of ideas and is passionate about teaching children to sow the seeds of knowledge through gardening. She always has a creative, innovative drive for any lesson she may be teaching. Her exciting outlook always seems to draw people in to the good things going on in 4-H.

Gardening is one of America’s favorite pastimes. Way down in south Mobile County, 4-H’ers are getting their hands in the soil, using their imaginations constructively and beginning to improve healthful eating habits. On the grounds of the Mobile County Extension office, you can find wonderful blooming plants as well as the most succulent fruit of the season. Vegetables are a year-round commodity.

All of this is managed and maintained by the JMG 4-H Club. Nutrition begins in the garden. Because children have grown the produce themselves, they are more likely to eat new and different fruits and vegetables. Growing fruits and vegetables in the JMG garden provides an environment where health, nutrition, food safety and wise decision-making skills are taught.

Smith helps children learn about the many benefits and possibilities available through gardening. Children influence their parents. When youngsters educate parents about gardening and growing healthily nutritious foods, their families are more likely to spend quality time together and improve the daily food intake. Since the gardens are built on county property, they are visited by the public on a daily basis.

As her name implies, “Penny” Smith is a shining example of what 4-H volunteers stand for: Learning, Doing and Caring. Lucky for 4-H!

Nominated by Maranda Marks, Mobile County Extension Agent Assistant

William Norwood
Marengo County Extension Coordinator (retired)

William Norwood began his ACES career in Marengo County where he served youth and adults for 25 years. During that tenure as a 4-H agent, he worked with 400 to 500 4-H’ers each year. He used programs to motivate students in a poor, rural county to seek to achieve and to believe that they could achieve.

He was instrumental in establishing landscape projects with 4-H’ers at local schools in Marengo County. The Board of Education was so impressed with the effort that they budgeted funds to landscape all schools in the county. He also conducted 11 successful Community Pride projects through Chevron USA. He conducted 10 annual 4-H Fish and Wildlife camps with an average attendance of 70.

Norwood conducted countywide 4-H hog and dairy shows. He worked with students to teach them how to prepare for those shows. County winners went on to win many awards at regional and state levels. His 4-H’ers were also winners in livestock judging events.

He has numerous district, regional, state and national winners in various 4-H demonstrations including wood science exhibits, plant and soil science, Chicken-Que, public speaking, small engines and electric demonstrations. He freely gave his time to work individually with students interested in competing. For several years, he had state 4-H Leadership, Achievement and Citizenship winners.

Norwood not only encouraged students to attend 4-H camp at the Alabama 4-H Center in Columbiana, but also arranged their transportation to the center. He knew that most of these children had no transportation to camp. He wanted them to have the positive experience of attending. He became the bus driver so that these children county attend camp.

He laughingly recalls 4-H’ers from around the state calling him “Mr. 4-H.” But he adds that he proudly wore the green and white sports jackets, ties, pants and shirts.

William Norwood was also a valuable member of the Marengo County community. He was the first minority member of the Linden City School Board. He has been active in AACAAS and has served as District III coordinator twice. He received recognition from the Boy Scouts, ACESEO and too many other groups to list. He established the first farmers market in Marengo County. William Norwood is an adult willing to give whatever time needed to help young people.

Nominated by Kathryn Friday, Marengo County Extension Coordinator
Tammy Powell

Pike County Extension Coordinator (retired) and 4-H Alumna

Tammy Powell’s love of 4-H began as a 10-year-old Houston County 4-H’er. “One of my earliest 4-H memories was having my father sit me down on a bale of hay while he and my mother worked on a 4-H exhibit at the Peanut Festival in Dothan with some members from my mother’s 4-H club. I couldn’t have been more than 3 at the time, but the memory is still vividly stamped in my brain!”

Powell began her Extension career in Jackson County where she worked more than 7 years before transferring to Pike County. She retired as county Extension coordinator with 34 years in Extension.

“When I started work in Pike County, we had 16 4-H clubs with 618 members,” she says. “When I retired, we had more than 55 4-H clubs with more than 1,700 members.”

Competition Day was established to allow youth to compete in as many competitions as they felt they could do well. 4-H’ers also had the opportunity to watch others and learn good techniques. Volunteers and parents assisted the County 4-H Council in planning, setting up and conducting the program. “Working with local volunteers was another perk for me,” she says. “Developing personal friendship with those volunteers made the 4-H program stronger too.”

Glenda Kelly, 4-H volunteer, says, “Mrs. Powell is always encouraging and motivating. She helped students to set high goals and to show enthusiasm and pride; to make every single day productive.”

Powell sites as highlights of her career: the State 4-H Council officers, Community Service activities planned by 4-H’ers including cemetery clean-up, counselors at Alabama 4-H Center and the National 4-H Conference Center, and chaperoning Citizenship Washington Focus, National 4-H Conference, National 4-H Poultry Conference, National 4-H Engineering event and National 4-H Conversation in D.C.

Powell has been a member and officer in ALAE4-HA, AACAAS, NEAFCS and ESP. She has received many awards including Outstanding Business Woman of Pike County. She is active in community organizations including Pike County Cattlewomen, Brundidge United Methodist Church and Pike County United Way.

“As a 4-H’er, I saw what an impact my 4-H agents had on my life, how they seemed to take a personal interest, and I knew that I wanted to do that same thing for 4-H’ers,” says Powell. “I only hope that during my career, I made a difference in the lives of some 4-H’ers!”

Nominated by Glenda Kelly, Pike County 4-H Volunteer

Christyn Sells

Escambia County 4-H Volunteer and 4-H Alumna

Occasionally, one meets someone who really has a passion for 4-H work and Christyn Sells more than meets that qualification. The Poarch Creek 4-H Club is unique because the children are unique. They have a much different cultural experience than most Alabama youth because of their heritage.

Sells has been the 4-H volunteer leader for more than 5 years. The club meets twice a month, and there are approximately 35 members. Nutrition education is a vital part of the program because the after-school program feeds the youth a nightly meal. She uses Chef 4-H to help teach the 4-H’ers the keys to good nutrition and lets them have fun cooking and baking while learning.

“I am motivated by young people sharing their experiences and learning new things. It is priceless for me to see them grow and evolve into who they will become,” states Sells. “4-H has really allowed me to do this and be a part of the lives of this next generation.”

Sells was introduced to 4-H when she was in the fifth grade by her mother. She won first place in public speaking. That win got her started. Her goal is to expose her club members to any positive youth education program and 4-H fills this goal.

Projects include cooking and baking, gardening, learning about chickens and horses, and arts and crafts. The members participate in 4-H contests, go to 4-H Summer Camp, and take field trips to 4-H AU football and basketball days. They also attend and participate in the State 4-H Horse Show by entering exhibits in the passive education classes.

Sells focuses on educating the youth about giving back to the community. They participate in activities to raise funds for groups including the Tractor Supply Company/4-H Partnership, the Escambia County Humane Society, Share Our Strength, and the Great American Bake Sale.

Sandra Hiebert, education executive director with Poarch Band of Creek Indians, says, “Christyn is remarkable. I have known her 10 years now, and she has always had a heart for children. We joke that she should have been born during the pioneer days because she loves the art of actually making a home. If she was able, I have no doubt she would be on 100 acres somewhere growing her own food, raising chickens, cows, goats, etc. and children! She is a true role model in every sense of the word, and I am very proud of her efforts on behalf of the Tribe. In my opinion, Christyn is 4-H personified.”

Nominated by Cynthia Knowlton, Regional Extension Agent