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A heat advisory warning hangs in the hot summer air. Temperatures at the Douglas County 4-H fairgrounds have passed 100 degrees, but 9-year-old Mariah Schwager of Lawrence, Kan., doesn't seem to notice. She kneels brushing Amethyst, her 6-month-old purebred lamb, as Mariah prepares to show her in the Douglas County Fair sheep show.

"I try not to be nervous," Mariah says.

She began showing sheep about two years ago and has had Amethyst since the lamb was born on Mariah's birthday in February. She

by:  
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## Kansas Bankers and 4-H

says she wants to do well but also likes learning from the judges when her lamb does not earn the highest marks.

"I don't like getting all blues," Mariah says. "I like getting reds because then the judges tell me how to improve."

Sam Wilson, of Baldwin, shows rams. He explains that the judges consider muscle tone and length of the legs when they evaluate the sheep. At 13, Sam has been participating in 4-H for seven years.

Sam and Mariah represent just two members of 4-H, an organization with roots more than a century old. Since the clubs' early days, Kansas bankers have supported these groups in their communities.

### A Long Relationship

Kansas 4-H clubs have been instrumental in the development of national 4-H programming. In 1919, Kansas City hosted one of the most important meetings in the history of the 4-H movement. At this meeting, 4-H established the general structure of local clubs, encouraged the expansion of projects, defined relations between club work and vocational education in the schools, and ratified the general principle of local initiative.

*Katie Holman is a University of Kansas journalism graduate who now makes her home in Boston. This article was first published in The Kansas Banker, September 2002, and is used with permission.*



The first Kansas club leader worded the first 4-H pledge, which was adopted nationally at the first National Club Congress in 1922.

Ties between Kansas bankers and the 4-H began nearly 100 years ago when bankers contributed to rural youth club work. A 1963 *Kansas Banker* article detailed the relationship between the two groups:

*"Kansas banks, from the start of the [4-H] movement, have given support and encouragement to the organized program of assisting rural youth to become better agriculturalists, better citizens."*

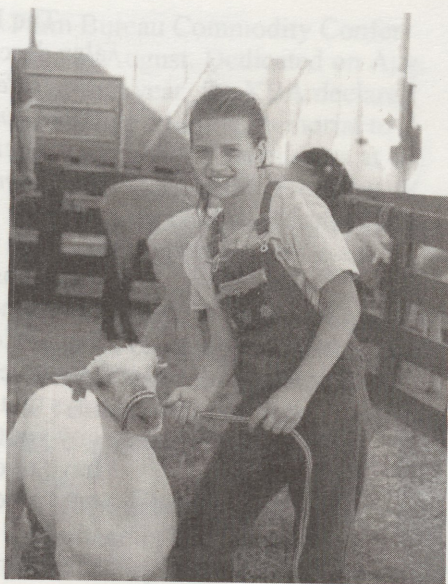
Many Kansas bankers have served the 4-H through the years. W. Dale Critser, then executive vice president of Wichita's Fourth National Bank, served as the first 4-H Foundation chairman in 1952. Today, Kansas bankers Murray Lull and Bill New volunteer for the organization that shaped much of their childhoods.

Lull, president of Smith County State Bank & Trust Co., Smith Center, Kan., grew up as a member of 4-H. He was a lifeguard at 4-H summer camp as a teenager and today finds a different way to participate in the organization. Lull serves as secretary on the board of trustees for the Kansas 4-H Foundation and has been a member of the board for the last 12 years.

"Local banks believe in what these clubs are doing," Lull says.

Kansas Bankers Association (KBA) Executive Vice President Jim Maag agrees. "Banks, in general, tend to be very supportive of activities in their communities," he says. "Money donated to the 4-H has been very well used."

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*Mariah Schwager and Amethyst*

In 1913, the KBA began making an annual contribution to the statewide 4-H program. Donations support members traveling to conferences and other educational trips. Maag says the KBA received thank you letters from traveling members each year.

Bill Riley, Kansas 4-H Foundation president, says Kansas bankers historically have looked to community activities they believed in as something they want to support. Because 4-H programs involve kids across the state and an equal number of boys and girls, the programs are a good choice for donations.

4-H focuses on preparing youths for adulthood through projects teaching life skills, Riley explains. These basic ingredients include responsibility, organization, presenting an idea and following a project from start through completion.



The National 4-H headquarters website also describes the benefits of the programs:

*"Life skills young people learn are skills, knowledge, attitudes and aspirations like decision-making, managing resources, and communications – those skills needed to function in a democratic society."*

Lull says he could attribute some measure of his business management skills today to his experiences in 4-H. Many Kansas business leaders learned skills such as running an effective meeting through 4-H, he explains. He says that while 4-H involves many rural kids, city youths also participate in clubs. "You don't have to own land or a steer to learn parliamentary procedure," he notes.

Lull cites citizenship as one of the most important skills taught through 4-H programming. Young people who grow up with these values and remain in Kansas become local leaders.

Bill New, chairman of the board at the First State Bank & Trust in Tonganoxie, Kan., also serves on the board of trustees at the Foundation. Like Lull, New became involved with 4-H at an early age.

"It was a very important aspect of my young life," he says.

New gave demonstrations, showed livestock and displayed other projects for competition. "We were a 4-H family."

Today, New has his own 4-H family – he met his wife at a 4-H social event when they attended Kansas State University, and the couple now has four children involved with 4-H.

"You don't have to be around 4-H very long to become aware that it is an organization that makes a difference in the community," New says. "And there is no better support of





community organizations than banks."

New says Kansas bankers invest in the future when they donate money to the 4-H.

"If it builds good citizens, that's a pretty good investment," he says. "It's where we'd like to invest our dollar – back into the communities we operate in."

New cites the International Farm Exchange Program, where 4-H members travel to different countries to live and learn with other families, as just one of the many opportunities available to 4-H members today.

"The ability to learn to work with other people, the ability to get up in front of other people and express yourself – those are the skills that are really important in life," New says. "And 4-H really helps you develop those."

### **The Bankers' Cottage**

In 1964 the KBA donated funds to build a cottage at the Rock Springs 4-H center near Junction City, Kan. Construction began in the spring of 1964, and teams of builders completed almost all work in time for the

Farm Bureau Commodity Conference in August. Dedicated on Aug. 13 of that year, the KBA declared the cottage a lasting memorial to Kansas youth. In his address at the ceremony, then-KBA President W. E. Lehmberg challenged other state groups to support Kansas youth organizations.

"May these efforts continue and serve as a challenge to other groups and organizations interested in the youth of Kansas, our state's greatest resource," he said.

Now, nearly 40 years later, the cottage is due for renovation. Lull says he hopes Kansas bankers will again support construction efforts.

"I would think bankers would hate to see it change to the Chiropractor's Cottage, or the Insurance Agents' Cottage," he laughs.

Banks interested in supporting renovations should contact Lull at Smith County State Bank & Trust for more information. The telephone number is (785) 282-6682.

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