

4-H and the Competitive Atmosphere

Vanessa Spero-Swingle

4-H'ers strive to make the best better. One of the ways in which they can evaluate their progress in the 4-H program is by showcasing their work through competitive events and activities. 4-H provides opportunities for youth to do so in a supportive atmosphere. This allows youth to grow, develop, and enjoy the competitive experience without being deterred to try again next time. Youth may participate in events such as animal shows (poultry, beef), shooting sports, contests (photography, poster, gameboard) Fashion Revue, County Events, Share the Fun, project books, etc.

Although awards such as 1st place and Best of Show may be awarded at these events, 4-H places emphasis on the Danish system of judging. Youth are not judged against each other but judged against a set of standards. Youth are able to receive a blue ribbon (score of 90-100), red ribbon (score of 80-89), or white ribbon (score of 79 and below) for their work. 4-H age divisions (junior, intermediate, and senior) are applied so the younger 4-H members are not judged against the older, more experienced 4-H members. The youngest 4-H members, the Cloverbuds, are not judged at all but given participation ribbons. This encourages their enthusiasm and spirit in entering events without discouraging them by putting a score to their work.

The Danish system allows every 4-H'er the chance to receive recognition for a job well done, to showcase their work, and to improve upon their work for the next competition. For most competitions, judges are often volunteers selected from the community with a background in the subject matter and an interest in youth development. Oftentimes judges have the ability to ask questions during the judging event in order to connect with the youth and their work and evaluate their knowledge of the subject matter.

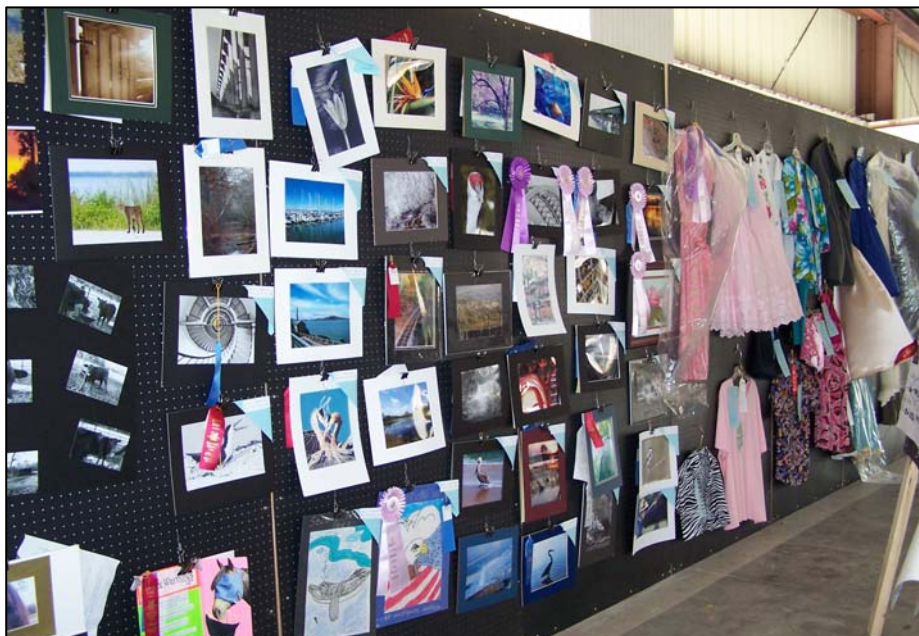


A judge questions a 4-H'er on her heifer during the Brevard County Fair in order to evaluate her knowledge of the animal.

All judges are oriented on the criteria for the contest they will be judging and given rubric sheets to assist with determining scores. Judges are encouraged to comment on 4-H'ers work in a positive matter and not to be critical or harsh. Judges are reminded to consider the age of the exhibitor they are judging and to be consistent in their judging style to ensure fairness.

Rubrics for competitions, such as photography and poster art, allow judges to comment and score on the 4-H'ers project appearance (is the clover represented, is it visually neat and appealing), the subject matter appropriateness (does it show a level of knowledge gained for the project area), and creativity. When judges are evaluating a 4-H'er during a speech or demonstration, the rubric will allow comments and scoring based on the 4-H'ers appearance (is the clover represented, is the 4-H'er dressed appropriately for the topic), the subject matter appropriateness (is the 4-H'ers age considered, is the topic appropriate and a level of knowledge exhibited), the organization of the presentation (is there an introduction, body, and summary), and the delivery of the presentation (is the presenter animated, well organized, etc).

In the end, 4-H'ers walk away with the experience of the project, the memories to go along with it, and the ribbon to remember how they excelled at their goal. As 4-H'ers get older they can grow with the Danish judging system as their interests in the project continue to grow. At the same time judging is a positive experience for youth, it is also a positive experience for volunteers and many enjoy coming back year after year to judge again.



A sample of 4-H'ers work and the accolades they received at the 2010 Brevard County Fair, Melbourne, Florida.