

Central Region Winner

Tennessee 4-H: The Great Comeback

The air was hot as I walked down the familiar tile hallway lit by fluorescent lightbulbs. I breathed in the smell I associate with long practices and laughter. I never thought I would wax poetic about the Putnam County Extension office, but after spending months on Zoom, coming back to the extension felt like coming home. I look back on the memories I have there, all the opportunities I've had to give back, and all the setbacks I've faced and returned to fight another day. These things led to our great comeback.

4-H was founded in 1902. Looking back, there have been two world wars, two pandemics, and the Great Depression among other challenges since then. And yet 4-H has stayed strong through everything. What I've learned from surviving a few crises myself is that you must take advantage of every moment because who knows what will come next. Before the pandemic, I said no to opportunities because I was lazy and didn't want to work. I will admit that sometimes when I open my email and see several messages from my extension agent all I want to do is go back to sleep for a few hours; however, I never regret saying yes to an opportunity

My favorite time I got to give back in 4-H was the USDA milk giveaway. We spent hours loading gallons of milk into people's cars. Originally, we were limiting it to one gallon per car, but when 4,000 gallons of milk showed up, we became quite the milk promoters. While some people simply said no to our attempts to give them another gallon, others began to think of people they knew who might need milk. We had many people come through and get milk for their friends and neighbors. It is an amazing experience to serve the community and watch the people you served turn around and serve others.

No one's 4-H career is without challenges. It's easy to think of the last year as one big setback in my high school life, but it was a time when I grew a lot. I've learned to appreciate the little things more. In 4-H I've had many other kinds of setbacks. In 2019, I went to my first state forestry competition. I remember our team sitting on the grass in the rain at that competition, and we all talked about how this was not our year to win. When it was announced that we had gotten second, we were happy with that as a rookie team. We haven't had our triumphant return to forestry yet, but I'm ready for it when it comes.

Congress took a year off, but through difficult times, 4-H never has. We've all worked hard and sacrificed this year. Right now, I celebrate our comeback and look forward to my future in 4-H while I cherish the past and the lessons I've learned from it.

489 words

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