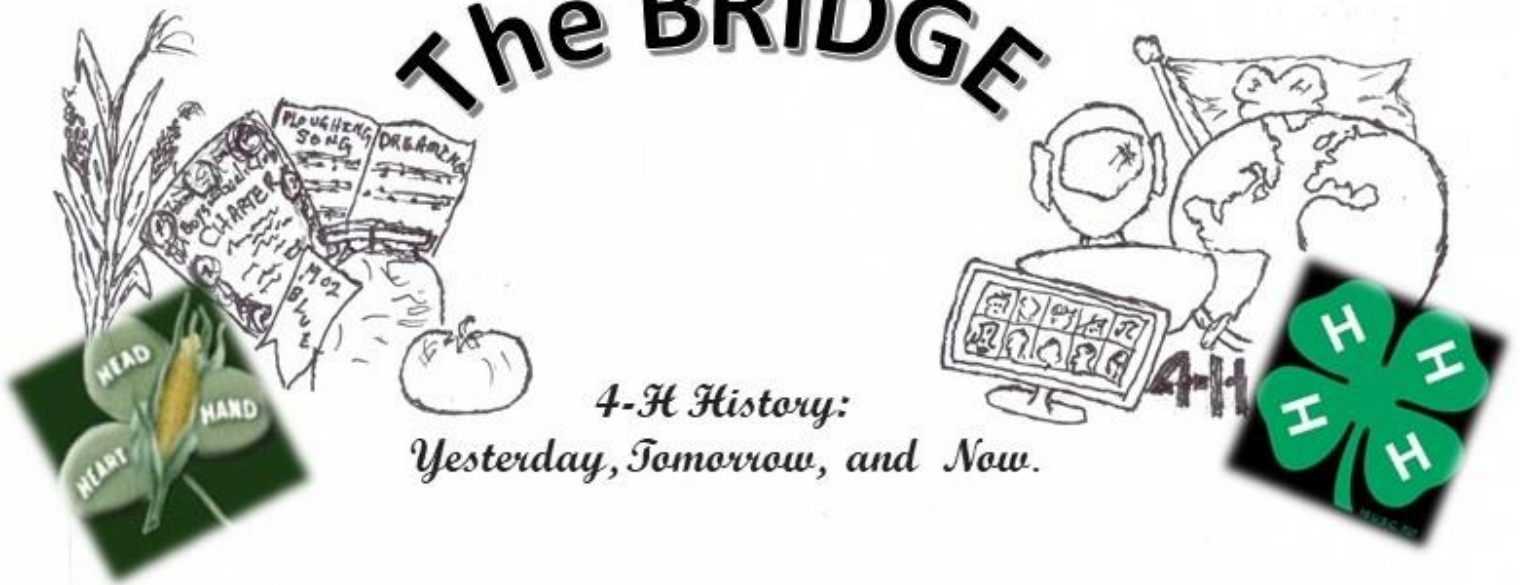


The BRIDGE



*4-H History:
Yesterday, Tomorrow, and Now.*

Vol. 10, No. 2

June, 2021

The National 4-H Conference Center - Another COVID-19 Victim.

By Bo Ryles, EdD., Sr. Director, National 4-H Council; Tom Tate, National Program Leader (Retired), Extension Service, USDA; Ron Drum, PA 4-H Member, 1967 - 1977

For over 73 years, since the idea of a national home for 4-H was first proposed in 1948 to the day in March, 2021, when the property was placed on the market for sale, the National 4-H Center has weathered many a challenge and financial crisis. However, it took a world-wide pandemic to force National 4-H Council to shut the Center's doors permanently; a world-wide pandemic that closed down economies around the world and left National 4-H Council without the income it needed to keep the National 4-H Center open.

In announcing the sale, National 4-H Council President and CEO Jennifer Sirangelo stated:

We are incredibly proud of our rich 60-year history at the National 4-H Conference Center.

We have had a positive impact on the thousands of youth groups and organizations we have hosted. Millions of 4-H young people, professionals, and volunteers worldwide have been inspired through 4-H gatherings that shared knowledge, built relationships, and created wonderful memories. Although our home is changing, National 4-H Council remains committed to expanding opportunities for all of America's youth to thrive.

We as a 4-H community, and many of us as individuals, are not only saying "good-bye" to a place that has served us all so well through the years, but thank-you, as well, to a place that has become a beloved part of so many of our lives. We cannot change the circumstances that have brought us to this place in time; neither can we forget what once was and the impact that it has had on each of our lives and the program we know as 4-H.

As we look to the future, we recall that the past teaches us that change is a certainty. 4-H has been evolving for more than a century; it didn't even have a "national home" for the first 50. After this change, there will still be a "national home" for 4-H in the Washington, D.C. area. It certainly will not look the same as it has for the past 70+ years, but we are talking about 4-H! As "4-H Historians", we can't wait to see what the future of 4-H will bring!

*To stay
informed on
developments
relative to the
National 4-H
Conference
Center sale,
visit:*

[The National
4-H
Conference
Center.](#)

How the Center came to be

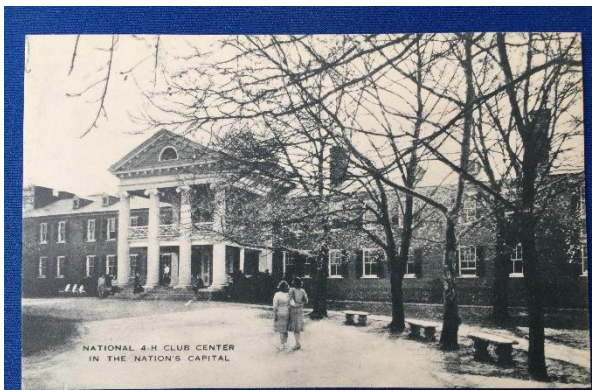
As 4-H developed, national officials realized there were needs of the program they were finding difficult to meet. Even as the 4-H program was just gaining the name 4-H, Extension Service professionals were applying the Extension techniques of making the best better to what was then known as the 4-H Boys' and Girls' Club program. In 1927, the Secretary of Agriculture called a conference of 4-H Members from across the country to seek advice directly from the 4-H members, themselves, on how to improve the 4-H program. It was originally called the National Farm Boys' and Girls' 4-H Club Camp. It eventually became known as the National 4-H Conference.

From 1927 to 1941, the Camp was housed on the Washington, D.C. mall in Army tents set up just outside the Department of Agriculture, in the shade of the Washington Monument. There the 4-H Members gathered from across the country to gain a greater understanding of their civic duties, to explore the historic sights of their capital city, all while giving their input, recommendations, and advice about 4-H to the Secretary of Agriculture! This annual conference only stopped because of WWII. After the war, it became impossible to continue allowing teens to sleep in tents on the mall, so the conference was moved to local hotels. Planners realized quickly this was not a suitable solution. They felt they needed their own facility, a Home for 4-H.

After the war, a few soldiers, each former 4-H'ers, realized that they felt less anger at those Germans they had become acquainted with while serving in German towns and villages, than those "anonymous" Germans they faced on the battlefields. These soldiers reasoned that if everyone could just meet their "enemies", it would increase the chances of peace to exist in the world. They envisioned a program where 4-H'ers could live with people in other countries in the hope that peace would grow as a result. However, Extension Service-USDA could not run such a program; "international" programs were outside their described "national" purpose. Suddenly there were two reasons to establish a National Home for 4-H, 1). to have a place for the Secretary's conference, and other volunteer and professional 4-H staff trainings, could be held, and 2). a location where the private foundation could operate an international "4-H" program (the program was eventually called the International Four-H Youth Exchange [IFYE]).



Maine delegation to the 1936 National Farm Boys' and Girls' 4-H Club Camp.



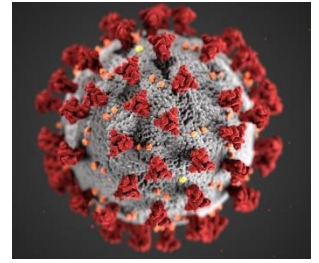
National 4-H Center postcard circa 1959.

The stories are many for how the founders of the National 4-H Club Foundation worked to make such a "home" become a reality. Some unsubstantiated stories even suggested that individuals cashed in life insurance policies and mortgaged their homes to help raise the funds. In the end, a national home for 4-H was established in Chevy Chase, one mile north of the District of Columbia boundary, just seven miles north of the White House. Dedicated in 1959 by President Eisenhower, it became one of the largest non-formal education youth centers in the nation. As described on the National 4-H History Preservation Website: it "...is more than a group of buildings...the Center is a nucleus of creative learning for youth and adults who come from around the nation and around the world to gain new insights, develop creative ideas and practical skills."

And then came COVID-19

Early 2020, this country was hit by a new virus. According to the [World Health Organization](https://www.who.int), this new virus is a type of Coronavirus which got that name because someone thought those little knobs that stick out from these viruses resemble little crowns or coronas. Coronaviruses are not new, one of them is known as the Common Cold. This new one, however, does not give us just a runny nose. This one can cause, among other things, a severe acute respiratory illness. This is the second Coronavirus to hit us this way so this one was called "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2" or SARS-CoV-2 for short. The disease that SARS-CoV-2 gives us was first seen in Asia in late 2019 so it was named Coronavirus Disease – 2019, COVID-19, short for.

Doctors knew little to nothing about this disease when it hit. One thing they did know was that they needed to stop it from spreading. In March, 2020, to help retard the spread of the disease, people were told to stay at least six-feet away from other people and to wash their hands frequently. Places where people gathered together, such as movie theatres, restaurants, and conference centers, were closed. Obviously, this included the National 4-H Conference Center. The economy, in fact, came to a stand-still. Groups with plans to stay at the Center, had to cancel. New bookings were forced to be put on hold. Center income stopped but, of course, expenses continued to be incurred and bills began to mount.

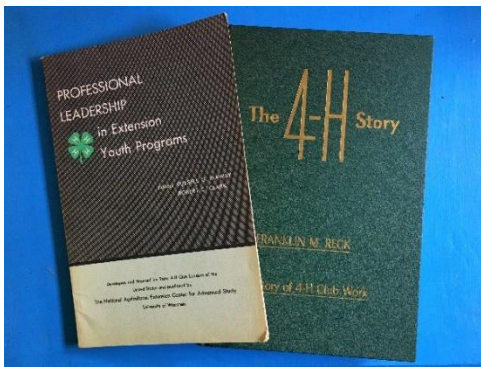


The Center officials held on for as long as possible, always hoping for the day when groups could return to the National 4-H Center. However, that day was too long in the coming. The Board of Directors realized that if National 4-H Council was to continue as a strong partner to USDA and Cooperative Extension, fulfilling its unique role of convening the 4-H system, telling the 4-H story, and building public-private partnerships, there was only one alternative left to them, sell the National 4-H Center.

On March 16, 2021, a year after the pandemic was proclaimed in the U.S.A., National 4-H Council announced the National 4-H Conference Center was for sale. President Sirangelo stated that the sale would position National 4-H Council to continue its mission of expanding the opportunity for all of America's youth through increased investment and participation in 4-H positive youth development programs.

Glimpses of the future

Housed at the National 4-H Center are many 4-H artifacts of historic importance. In recent years, the National 4-H History Preservation Team has been collecting the original artwork used to create the National 4-H Calendars, income generated by the sale of some of these calendars served to help purchase the property! One-of-a-kind documents and books are part of the 4-H Collection. Memorabilia, such as the scissors used by President Eisenhower to cut the ribbon to open the Center, J.C. Penney's hat, scrap books made by Dorothy Emerson, and awards won by Kathleen Flom are also included in the collection. What is to become of those?



The National 4-H History Preservation Team has been working to move its historic 4-H Art collection to the [National Agricultural Library](#). This effort will continue and, with the help of a team at National 4-H Council, documents and books of historic importance will become part of the [National Agricultural Library's Else Carper Collection](#). There will be opportunities for loaning copies of the items to 4-H groups. Some of the memorabilia, such as Mr. Penney's hat, will be returned to the owners, and some of the memorabilia, such as the items now on display in Kathleen's Corner at the Center, will be on display in the new National 4-H Council offices, when they are designated. All of the valuable 4-H memorabilia will be in permanent homes for future generations.

National 4-H Council will continue to have offices in the Washington, D.C. metro area. National 4-H events, including the signature national civic engagement training program, Citizenship Washington Focus, will continue to be held in the D.C. metro area. National 4-H events hosted by National 4-H Council will be held virtually in 2021. Plans are in place for 2022 events to be held in-person in Washington, D.C.

Many argue that 4-H is more relevant today than when it was when the National 4-H Center opened in 1959 or even when it was first created in the early 1900s. The National 4-H History Preservation Committee is committed to preserving our history, allowing 4-H'ers of tomorrow to reflect on, and learn from, the past paths the organization has taken. NIFA, USDA and National 4-H Council are in concert supporting local 4-H leaders as they reach more young people with 4-H opportunities to learn and grow. Regardless of where young people and 4-H leaders gather, 4-H is positioned well for a prosperous future.



4-H Survives COVID-19! The Meet Goes On!

By Bill Svendsgaard, Hennepin County 4-H Educator (retired); MN 4-H History Team Leader

Times were a-changin' in 2020 for everyone. "It" hit in March: the COVID-19 Pandemic. People started coming down with a flu-like illness, but this one was filling the hospitals. We were told to stay away from each other; schools were closed, so were 4-H Clubs! "Zoom" meetings soon replaced Room meetings and waving through windows replaced hugs and handshakes. "Virtual" became the word for the day. The question was, could 4-H survive COVID-19?

Today, as the Pandemic wains, it appears that 4-H has "survived". We look to one state's example to glimpse how. The Associate Dean and Minnesota 4-H State Director, Jennifer Skuza, recently reflected on the past year:

"When the pandemic hit in March 2020, we shifted our programming to online. First, we made sure that youth were safe online and mobilized very quickly to ensure all staff, volunteers and partners knew best practices and our policies. All staff and volunteer representatives from each of our 800 clubs received training on online safety."

"In July 2020, we eased into in-person programming. This required the development of COVID-19 safety protocols and again staff and volunteer training. By April 2021, we had safely held over 4000 in-person activities". (Favorites included new cooking and outdoor adventures, developed 11,000 educational kits for members to explore new information and skill building on their own, and held 89 local showcases that replaced county fair competitions. Keep in mind that all county fairs and the State Fair were cancelled). "The kits are on 110 different topics where youth could learn safely at home and helped them get away from screens by turning backyards, green spaces, and city streets into learning environments."

"We also started youth podcasts, the most popular one encourages racial justice, and we promoted outdoor education. Many 4-H clubs did outdoor learning activities, including a winter gear drive to help youth and families with limited resources to be equipped for MN cold winter months. Over 13 local programs collected and donated a combined 2,071 winter gear items. We had 6,188 youth participate in 89 local showcases. We also had state showcase events with over 2,200 youth participating."

"MN 4-H has been able to bring in nearly 6,000 new 4-H'ers during the pandemic. Of that number, 57% were first generation 4-H'ers – meaning that they are first in their family to join 4-H. Over 9,000 youth participated in virtual programs from March 2020 to March 2021."

"We learned how to leverage technology to create incredible videos, images, music and more. State Arts In, 4-H Photography, and Day Camps at Home are examples. To enjoy our Minnesota State Arts performance singing and performing together by being separated and home alone, visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UgsXUcuX1-s&t=332s>."

"Evaluation and data collection have been priorities during the pandemic. We have improved our data collection and increased the amount of reporting to our stakeholders." Results showed:

- ✓ interests in new projects
- ✓ more 'showcase' events
- ✓ more service projects involving food insecurity, anti-racism and social justice.
- ✓ new families joining 4-H
- ✓ and virtual programming helped youth with special needs to participate more fully in 4-H.

Youth also indicated that 4-H programs helped them develop skills in managing stress, navigating ambiguity, working together across differences despite social isolation and the value of having connections with peers and adults."

As a retired, 26 years 4-H Educator from Hennepin County, I am overwhelmed with how well Minnesota survived COVID-19. Because of our 4-H Educators' innovation and dedication, the 4-H meet goes on!

Associate Dean and Minnesota 4-H State Director, Jennifer Skuza, skuza@umn.edu, contributed to this article.



Two Pandemics at Once

By Bill Svendsgaard, Hennepin County 4-H Educator (retired); MN 4-H History Team Leader

In early 2020, the nation was hit by the COVID-19 Worldwide Pandemic. Looking back on it, Hennepin County 4-H merely shrugs. After all, they were hit by TWO “pandemics” that Spring, COVID-19 that hit in March and the “George Floyd pandemic”. That one began just after 8:00pm on May 25 when Mr. Floyd, an African-American man, lost his life while in Minneapolis Police custody. Hennepin County, Minnesota consists of Minneapolis and the surrounding suburbs.

Hennepin County’s 4-H Educators, Amy Collura and Katherine Nguyen, knew they had a big job ahead of them. They had to hold their 4-H program together while everyone was being asked to stay 6 feet apart and do so while their community erupted in racial unrest!

Here are a few of their 2020 4-H successes.

1. **4-H HONORING AND LIFTING UP COMMUNITY.** 4-H youth leaders from the Minneapolis Franklin Library 4-H Club designed a mural near the George Floyd memorial site as a way to honor and lift up the community. They collaborated on quotes and imagery that both inspired them and would resonate with fellow community members.
2. **CONVERSATIONS ON RACIAL JUSTICE.** 4-H staff offered three sessions- Talking with kids about racial justice, open dialogue about racism for youth in grades 6+ and conversations around the film Just Mercy. These sessions gave 4-H youth and volunteers a chance to process and learn about the current events by engaging the youth and families in these critical issues.
3. **HANDS-ON LEARNING AT HOME.** While distance learning became a common thread among Hennepin County students, Nguyen pivoted to meet the needs of young 4-H’ers who were most impacted by limited activity and peer connections. She designed **Wiggle Wednesdays**, a virtual series for K-2 grade youth. For 15 minutes each Wednesday, 4-H’ers had an opportunity to be active and have fun with lessons focused on their head, heart, hands and health, expanding beyond county to reach over 100 Minnesota youth during summer and winter of 2020.
4. **A NEW ERA FOR A LEGACY ARTS PROGRAM.** The Metro Art Force, first established by 4-H Educator Bill Svendsgaard in 1985, has offered Hennepin County youth an outlet to explore the visual arts. During the pandemic, this daylong, in-person event was transitioned into a four-day virtual program. Youth zoomed in daily to explore various art forms with local artists, and then created projects using supplies that 4-H staff delivered to their homes.
5. **CREATIVE CAMPING.** Summer camp programs were upended in 2020, but Collura responded with an entirely virtual model. After redesigning the Urban Explorers 4-H Day camp, 41 4-H’ers across five weeks, built bird feeders, met live animals and completed outdoor activities from their own homes.
6. **CULTIVATING CHANGE AGENTS.** 4-H cultivates change agents and North High School became a site for this as 4-H Educator Amie Mondl worked alongside students to design and install a medicinal healing garden on the school grounds. The youth-identified goal of this garden was to be a beautiful space for building community, producing herbs and flowers for the school and training youth to be student leaders with their community. Chavis, a 4-H member, said, “I learned so much from working with Elder Candis on the North High Garden. It was an awesome experience. She taught me about what it means to be a leader in the community.”

Hennepin County 4-H Educators Amy Collura and Katherine Nguyen contributed to this article.



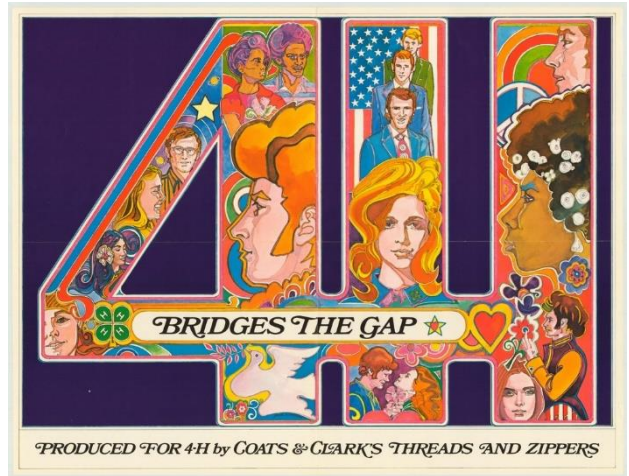
From Behind the Scenes

So, what’s up with that “Bridges the Gap” bit? Looks kind of like a groovy 1969 thing! OK, 1971, actually.

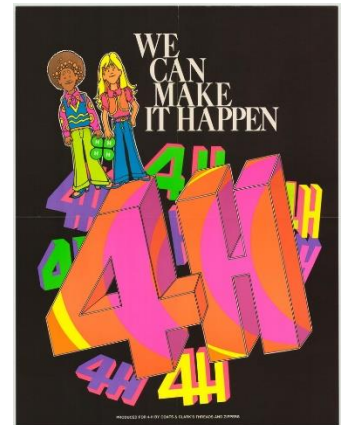
Starting in 1924, 4-H has had a theme, almost annually, usually displayed on a poster suitable for hanging on any good 4-H’er’s bedroom wall. Here is the 1971 poster, “4-H Bridges the Gap”.

Often, as one reads through a newsletter, without some kind of “separator” the articles can begin to run together, So, we are using this graphic as a “separator” to help us bridge the gap, so to speak, from one article to the next, and from times past to times of today.

All of which just goes to prove, we aren’t lying when we say 4-H:



But wait! There’s more! Look closely and you will see that there is another historic 4-H poster in our new layout, as well! It is helping us highlight the National 4-H History Preservation Team’s members who are working to make this newsletter possible: the 4-HHPTeam subcommittee known as “The BRIDGE Editorial Board”. They are listed on the scroll at the bottom of this page. Just look for the 1974 poster, “We Can Make It Happen 4-H”. It looks like this:



The BRIDGE Editorial Board

Sue Benedetti, Dave Benedetti, Gwen El Sawi, Tom Tate, Rick Moses, Ron Drum