

THE JACKSON COUNTY FAIR: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LEARNING AND GROWTH

From the perspective of an exhibitor



Jackson Electric Cooperative is an annual supporter of the Jackson County Fair, and we enjoy sharing fair news with our members through this magazine. Brandi Shramek, Jackson Electric's communications intern, continues to exhibit at the fair. This story gives Brandi's perspective of the county fair, and what she's learned throughout her years of participation.

A voice booms over the loudspeaker announcing the license plate of a car that needs to move. The scent of grilled hamburgers at the 4-H Food Stand mingles with the aroma of French fries, funnel cakes, and of course, cheese curds. The FFA stand is selling milkshakes. The animal exhibitors prepare for their turn in the arena, while others anxiously wait to see if they got a blue ribbon on their non-animal exhibit in the Milt Lunda Arena. This is the beginning of August in Jackson County. This is the Jackson County Fair.

I'm not an expert on showing livestock, and I definitely have not shown at the fair as long as others. However, I was a member of the Hixton Lucky Clovers 4-H Club from 2005–2015. During that timeframe, I was an exhibitor at the Jackson County Fair. Most exhibitors probably have a funny fair story or two to share. I do not necessarily have one of those stories. I may be able to tell you about the time that it hailed, but I think that's self-explanatory. However, what I do have to offer are the years of memorable fair experiences that provided me with an opportunity to learn and grow.

Starting from the beginning, my sister and I joined 4-H together. We started by exhibiting just a few items our first year. In the years following, we learned more about 4-H and the endless list of items that we could exhibit. In 2008, we convinced our parents to get rabbits. At the Jackson County Small Animal

Auction we bought our first rabbits, Patches and Annabelle. We learned more about how to show rabbits, got involved with the Small Animal Committee, and eventually added chickens and alpacas to our property. We both showed alpacas, but my sister was always the "chicken lady" while I focused on the rabbits (I am finally beginning to like chickens).

Back to that endless list of items to exhibit: Who knew there could be so much involved with showing a rabbit? Did I mention that my sister showed a guinea pig or that we participated in the dog project for a few years? I never imagined that I would be leading my alpacas through an obstacle course, guiding them through a hula hoop, and up a set of stairs. Nor did I expect that we would test their public relations skills by seeing how they reacted to a chicken (of all animals) or to a person they were not familiar with.

Some years it seemed like we signed up for the whole fair book, figuratively speaking, of course. This is where the learning and growth began. I may have started out with entries in many different fair departments varying from alpacas to shooting sports, and everything in between, but each year my list of entries got smaller. Why? Because I learned what my interests were and began to focus on my strengths. I wanted to be great at a handful of things, rather than just good at many things.

When I competed in the junior fair, my main non-animal exhibits were entries in photography, home furnishings, and crocheting. My sister and I graduated from 4-H in 2015, so why do I continue to enter exhibits in these same departments in the open class category? It's because of that learning and growth that I keep mentioning. My most memorable fair experiences occurred near the end of my 4-H career, but have

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1. Brandi is showing Annabelle in the Netherland Dwarf rabbit show.
2. Brandi is walking her alpaca, Quinzee, through the obstacle course. The alpaca is judged on how well it completes the obstacles.
3. Brandi, left, along with her sister Kandi, just completed showing alpacas at the county fair.
4. Brandi's first year of open class projects. The doily in the upper right-hand corner of this photo was her very first project.

YOUTH AMBASSADORS TRAVEL TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

Two Jackson Electric Youth Ambassadors, Mykayla Wollin and Cassandra Berger, had the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C., to participate in the Electric Youth Tour June 10–16. The Electric Youth Tour is held in June each year in Washington, D.C.

At the local cooperative level, this tour is open to high school juniors or seniors who participate in Jackson Electric’s Youth Ambassador Program.

The Youth Tour was established in the late 1950s and gives high school students the opportunity to meet with 1,500 youth from around the country. The purpose of the Youth Tour is to give students the opportunity to visit D.C., learn about political processes, and interact with government officials. Jackson Electric believes it is important for youth to learn about how electric cooperatives and the government interact. Students who apply for the Youth Tour are required to complete an application and a written essay or video.

Mykayla says she was interested in participating in the Electric Youth Tour because she thought it would be a good experience and opportunity. This was her first time in D.C. This was also Cas-

sandra’s first visit to D.C. and her first time on an airplane. While on the trip, Cassandra and Mykayla had the chance to meet people, sightsee, and talk to our elected officials.

“We had the chance to meet with Ron Kind, Tammy Baldwin, and Sean Duffy’s legislative assistant,” shares Mykayla. “While talking with Ron, we asked a lot of questions about education,” adds Cassandra, “and he told us a little bit about himself.”

When they were not meeting with representatives, the students had a chance to learn more about cooperatives. Cassandra says she learned there are many types of cooperatives “that all have different ways of making sure they’re financially giving back to their members.”

Mykayla says she left for D.C. with some background on cooperatives, but left the Youth Tour with a greater understanding. “We were able to learn about the different values and kinds of cooperatives,” she adds.

The students had the opportunity to see many of the memorials and monuments around D.C. Mykayla’s favorite part of the trip was the opportunity to meet people and sightsee. “I was able to



Mykayla Wollin and Cassandra Berger were selected to represent Jackson Electric at the Electric Youth Tour in June.

make a lot of friends while I was there,” she shares. “It was also cool to see all the different museums and monuments.” Cassandra enjoyed Mount Vernon, where George Washington lived. She says, “We got to see his whole estate and learn about his life.”

Asked if they would recommend the trip to others, each had a positive answer. “Yes, I would definitely recommend this trip,” says Mykayla. “I was able to meet a lot of people and see things that I might not get to see again.”

Cassandra adds, “Yes, because it is an influential trip where you get to see the nation’s capital and learn more about cooperatives.”

Both students say that they gained knowledge from their participation. Cassandra recounts, “I met so many new people that all have the same goals and aspirations to help cooperatives and this country.” She realized that even in a big city, people still share the same values.

Mykayla shares that the trip helped her get out of her comfort zone. While on the Youth Tour, the students trade their state pins with other states. “If I wanted to trade pins (or in Wisconsin’s case, cow erasers) I would have to talk to people. I learned a lot about the 50 states.”

Mykayla’s Journey Continues

Because Mykayla attended the Electric Youth Tour, she had the opportunity



1. Mykayla Wollin and Cassandra Berger at the Electric Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. 2. Senator Tammy Baldwin takes time to speak to Wisconsin’s youth delegation. 3. Mykayla will go on to represent Wisconsin on the NRECA Youth Leadership Council.



to apply to be a representative on the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's (NRECA) Youth Leadership Council. One student is selected to represent each state. Mykayla was selected to represent Wisconsin, and returned to D.C. in July for a leadership workshop focusing on the electric cooperative industry.

The Youth Leadership Council is an opportunity for the delegates to improve their leadership and public speaking

skills. At this workshop, Mykayla shared a five- to seven-minute prepared speech about what inspired her on the Youth Tour trip. One student was selected to be the Youth Leadership Council National Spokesperson to address the membership at the NRECA annual meeting and to address next year's Youth Tour delegates. (Selection was made after the deadline for this issue.)

Mykayla will also be representing Wisconsin at the NRECA annual meet-

ing February 24–28 in Nashville, Tenn.

“At the annual meeting, I will have the chance to present our state flag and introduce myself at the opening ceremony. I will also help manage the information booth throughout the week,” she shares.

Mykayla hopes that this experience will help her learn and grow. “Who knows,” she adds, “it might even help me figure out who I am.” —*Brandi Shramek, communications intern*

CATCHING UP WITH A PAST YOUTH AMBASSADOR

Erica Olson was part of the 2011–12 group of Jackson Electric Cooperative youth ambassadors. We caught up with her to learn what she's doing now.

It's been six years since Erica Olson was a participant in Jackson Electric's Youth Ambassador Program. A 2012 graduate of Black River Falls High School, Erica attended UW-Madison where she majored in agronomy with a certificate in agricultural business management.

“I always planned to attend UW-Madison, and I knew that I wanted to major in something ag-related,” shares Erica.



Erica Olson discusses the youth ambassador case study with a fellow ambassador.

In college, she took on many officer positions and leadership roles in student organizations including Badger Crops Club, Association of Women in Agriculture, and Collegiate Farm Bureau. Asked about her interaction with co-ops since high school graduation, Erica says that she was the treasurer for Badger Crops Club. “As the treasurer, I was in charge of financial decisions, fundraisers, and our accounts which were at the UW Credit Union,” she adds.

The youth ambassador program provided Erica with problem solving and leadership skills that she applied throughout college and currently uses in her full-time employment. As a youth ambassador, she had the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C., for the Electric Youth Tour.

“This was a memorable experience where I had the opportunity to meet other ambassadors from different states and to learn about the structure and functionality of cooperatives,” Erica adds.

Erica graduated from UW-Madison in May of 2016, and she is currently employed at UW Discovery Farms in



Erica now works for the UW Discovery Farms in Pigeon Falls.

Pigeon Falls. This is “an Extension program that focuses on water quality research and outreach in the state of Wisconsin,” describes Erica.

Erica plans to continue her career in the agricultural industry with UW Discovery Farms and helping on her parents' dairy farm in her spare time. —*Brandi Shramek, communications intern*

MY CO-OP

JUNE PHOTO WINNER

June photo of the month winner is Lane Epstein of Millston. This photo was taken on Lake Lee in Millston. Lane received a \$25 energy credit and this photo is on display at Jackson Electric.



Jackson Electric Cooperative's Annual MEMBER PICNIC IN THE PARK

Tuesday, August 15, 2017
Serving 3:30 to 6:30 p.m.
Lunda Park Upper Shelter
Black River Falls

Serving pulled pork sandwiches with all the traditional picnic sides, including ice cream. Stay after the picnic to listen to music by Them Coulee Boys as part of the Summer Music in the Park series.



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shaped my outlook on competing in open class.

I volunteered to help with Cloverbud judging (grades K–2) for two years. This gives young exhibitors an introduction to 4-H and the opportunity to share their projects face-to-face. It was an enjoyable experience to hear young children share their collection of rocks, tell me about the photograph they took of their pet, or explain the process of baking cookies with their mom. At the end of each child’s judging, I remember asking what the child learned and what project he or she planned to work on next.

Volunteering with the Cloverbud judging has served as a reminder that there is more to the fair experience than getting a blue ribbon. In Cloverbuds, there are no blue, red, or white ribbons representing first, second, and third place, respectively. Instead, there is a green ribbon awarded for each exhibit that a child enters. I believe this system is a start to teaching children that there is always room for improvement and that we should not always determine our success based upon what placing we receive.

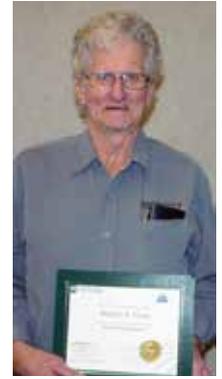
To me, the fair is an opportunity for learning, growth, and showcasing talents and hard work through exhibits. Obviously, the judges must do their job and place entries accordingly, based upon certain criteria such as the guidelines listed in the fair book, effort, and the final product. However, whether that placing is first or last, there is knowledge that can be gained from the experience.

I continue to show at the fair through open class because I enjoy the feedback I receive from the judging process. Learning and growth happens when we are willing to be vulnerable and share our work with the public. In the crocheting department, I decided to make my first doily and entered it when I was in junior fair. From that experience, I learned that my stitches were too loose and I needed to do more blocking on the garment for a flat display. The following year, I entered another doily using the techniques that I learned and ended up earning an outstanding ribbon. Sure, the first doily that I made was a lot of work, but without constructive feedback I may not have ever improved and I may not have ever known what I was doing wrong. As I mentioned earlier, success should be determined by the knowledge gained from the experience. That room for improvement is why I continue to exhibit my work.

This year’s Jackson County Fair is August 2–6. If you go to the fair, take time to enjoy all the exhibits, and save some room for a milkshake or a funnel cake.

MEET YOUR DIRECTOR, STANLEY GRAN

Stanley Gran, District 1 director, is a retired dairy farmer and factory worker. He resides three miles north-east of Northfield on a farm with his wife, Donna. Together they have three children and seven grandchildren. His hobbies include hunting, swimming, waterskiing, and gardening. Asked what personal accomplishment he is most proud of, Stan says, “Waterskiing again at 70 years old, and to remain standing at 30 miles per hour while doing so.”



Stan first got involved with the board when he saw a need for his leadership. “My district director died,” says Stan, “and I wanted to help the members in my district.” His duties on the board include studying, helping make policies that will benefit members, and serving on special boards when appointed.

Learning and helping by talking to members and other co-op directors is Stan’s favorite part of being a board member. Stan feels it is important to remind members to be in communication with the co-op and the board of directors.

“Don’t hesitate to call your board member if you have a question,” shares Stan, “and try to attend our picnic and annual meeting.” —*Brandi Shramek, communications intern*

COMPUTER UPGRADE COMING IN 2018

Jackson Electric Cooperative will be upgrading its customer information system in February 2018. This upgrade will enable staff to handle member questions more efficiently, and members will have more convenient bill pay options. A vendor has been selected, and staff is in the process of analyzing data to be converted.

As we get closer to the “go-live” date, it will be important for you to watch your mail for updates regarding the upgrade. For now, we’ll keep you informed through this magazine, the quarterly newsletter, and Jackson Electric’s Facebook page.



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