

EDITORIAL *Volunteers give back through 4-H*



By Harvey Gordon
4-H Youth Development



During more than 30 years in public service, my most rewarding experiences have been working with 4-H youth programs in Arkansas and Mississippi.

The youth who actively participate in 4-H learn leadership, citizenship and skills that prepare them for life's challenges.

The programs and activities provided by 4-H are made possible by federal, state and local funding. Staff members at the state and county levels use the resources provided by that funding to implement and

conduct programs, but it would not be possible to reach the almost 90,000 young people involved in 4-H in Mississippi without adult volunteers.

For the past 10 years, I have served as coordinator of the state 4-H volunteer program. During that time, the number of adult volunteers working with 4-H throughout Mississippi has grown from about 2,500 to more than 7,000.

Each of those 7,000 volunteers makes a difference in the lives of the youth of our state by contributing an average of 220 hours to 4-H programs each year. They serve as project and activity leaders, as resource volunteers and in other capacities at the local and state level.

Individuals from all walks of life serve as 4-H volunteers. Some are retired and put their expertise and life skills to work for young people. Others are still raising families, and still others are teenagers and young adults who have been involved in the 4-H program.

The leadership and training they provide help 4-H members develop skills that will last a lifetime. Their willingness to give back is also an important part of strengthening families and communities.

This year, 4-H is celebrating 100 years of service to the youth of Mississippi. What began as a way to reach farm boys with information about how to grow bigger and better crops on the family farm has become a program for all young people, whether they live in the country, a small town or a large city.

Some 4-H'ers still participate in projects that focus on farm activities, from producing crops to raising and exhibiting livestock. Others develop their interests in computers, photography and other activities dealing with the latest technology. All, however, benefit from the expertise, interest and guidance of adult volunteers. Each county Extension office has information on becoming a 4-H volunteer.

During the past three decades, it has been a privilege to work with the dedicated people who give back to their communities and state as 4-H volunteers. I look forward to seeing the 4-H program continue to strengthen as it enters its second century of service to the young people of Mississippi.