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#### 4-H Projects are More than Just a Ribbon

Summer is in full swing. Kids are going to camp, families are taking vacations, and the swimming pools and splash pads are full of everyone trying to beat the heat. In our family, our summers looked very different. Instead of leisurely playing at the swimming pool, we were feverishly trying to finish our County Fair projects. The number of 4-H projects that get completed the week before the fair must be high. We all start with the best intentions to do a project every month or every few weeks, so the “mad rush” does not happen. However, reality sometimes looks very different.

There are so many options available to 4-H members. Looking through the project classes is like perusing the Sears toy catalog as a child. They all look like so much fun. And really, if you are making one flavor of jelly, why not make three so you can exhibit it as a group of three? How much more work is that? Well, that logic got us in trouble a lot. Why not cookies, breads, decorated cakes and pies too? I loved that the kids were interested in so many projects. But list all those above and throw in horses, bucket calves, sheep and goats and its plain chaos! Sometimes that chaos leads to so many good things.

A perfect example of a project growing into more was a leaf display board that our son wanted to exhibit. It seemed easy enough. The project guidelines required him to have 10 different leaves from a provided list. I really thought this would be a quick project. Seriously, there are a lot of trees in our town. Unfortunately, they are all kind of the same standard types: oak, maple, cottonwood etc.

Frustration was setting in when he was looking for the last and final leaf. We were about ready to leave town and start driving on gravel roads to find new trees. On our last trip around town, he saw a tree that had been cut down in a home’s back yard. We could tell it was different because the leaves were smaller and greener. We couldn’t tell what kind it was by looking over the fence. Our son knocked

on the door and asked if he could take a better look at the tree. The couple was excited to hear about the project and happily let him enter their backyard. What a great find, the tree was a Quaking Aspen. That was a leaf that we still needed to get him to 10 leaves. What a relief! Once we returned home, he finished the project by adding names and descriptions for each leaf. It turned out to be a great-looking display.

It also turned out to be more than just a 4-H project. We didn't expect to meet new friends. We didn't set out to spend hours and hours walking around town talking about and looking at trees, but we did. His hard work paid off with a rosette at our County Fair and he earned a purple at the State Fair.

As with all kinds of projects and experiences with 4-H over the years, we got way more out of this project than we thought we would. If you are currently rushing to finish your fair projects whether they are for a 4-H class or an open class exhibit, take the time to enjoy the process. Welcome all that is new that comes along with your work. Take the time to chat with your kids and grandkids about your memories of the Fair. Did you have a favorite project that went well? Was there one that went so horribly that you will never forget? Either way, I'm sure they would love to hear it.

We wish everyone the best of luck at their local County Fair. Remember to enjoy the fun of making projects and memories. If you have some extra time on your hands, see your Extension staff for information on how you can volunteer. We would love to have your help.

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