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South Loup River Valley

The Arnold Sentinel

CUSTER COUNTY, ARNOLD, NEBRASKA 69120

(USPS 032480)

THURSDAY, JULY 7, 2016

VOLUME 100, NUMBER 3



Left to right: Riata Remund, Brook Bierman, Devin Peterson, Faith Bierman and Kylee Lehmkuhler plant Zinnias as part of learning all about Horticulture from 4-H leader Rose Bierman. The girls are among some 15 4-Hers enrolled in the project. (Courtesy photo)

Back to the Basics

4-H Club Members Taking Interest in New Projects

Editor's Note: For a number of years, the Western Riders 4-H Club horse project has been going strong, with few to no entries in some of the other divisions at the county fair. This year, interest has significantly grown in other projects, with several new leaders taking 4-Hers "Back to the Basics." Horticulture/Gardening is the first in a series of these new offerings to local kids.

By Kendra Veirs

This is the third year local gardening expert Rose Bierman has volunteered to lead Western Riders 4-Hers in the Horticulture division, with a wide array of projects available in vegetables/fruit, cut flowers and herbs. This year marks the first year interest has been shown from the kids, with a record number of 15 Arnold kids, age 9-14, participating.

"I volunteered to lead the program because all my Bierman boys and Reba did the gardening projects in Michigan and continued when we moved to Nebraska. I wanted to give my grandkids or any other kids the opportunity to become garden-

ers because it is a good thing to know," said Rose, who raises a very large garden every year and is known around the area for her fresh produce.

The class meets at the Bierman garden every Monday, from 8:00 to 9:30 a.m., where the kids are given hands-on demonstrations in various areas. The kids keep journals and record what they learn and do each week.

The class started out by helping choose different varieties of seeds from catalogs, then kept busy by planting seeds, transplanting seedlings, laying water/drip tape and, of course, there is always the practice of weeding.

Rose emphasized that the kids practice non-chemical gardening.

Of interest, the gardening students have learned about planting plants and flowers that prevent disease in certain produce. For example, Borage was planted in the tomatoes that keep the tomato worm from appearing; Aster was planted in various places because it pre-

vents numerous bugs; and Nasturtium was planted in the zucchini and squash to prevent those pesky bugs that will kill a whole plant overnight.

The class has begun harvesting produce and practicing exhibits for the upcoming fair.

Each participant can choose four fruit/vegetable categories

to enter, along with four varieties of cut flowers and one herb.

Exhibits are judged on desirable and undesirable traits and uniformity which includes size, shape, color, maturity and true type for a winning project. A 4-H guide lists each type of exhibit available, specific

requirements and what judges will be looking for when awarding the ribbons at fair.

For example, if a student chooses tomatoes, a plate of five tomatoes will be submitted at fair. Desirable traits for tomatoes include firm, evenly colored, mature, uniform in size and shape that are true to cultivar and heavy for the size with small blossom scars. Undesirable traits to avoid include over-mature specimens with poor color, sunscald, blemishes, puffiness, growth cracks, disease, and insect or mechanical damage.

Plates differ according to type of produce, and range from 12 individual green beans making up the green bean exhibit; one pint of strawberries making up an exhibit; five stems of a single variety of flower making up an exhibit; and five specimens of herbs in a sprig required for the herb exhibit.

"The kids have learned that it is difficult to get 12 uniform green beans to make up a plate. It takes a lot of practice and patience. At one practice a student had 11 uniform green beans and one with a curve. I looked at the plate, and said that yes, that is a blue ribbon plate, but if you find a straight green bean instead of the one with a curve, it would turn into a purple. She quickly started searching for that straight green bean to finish the plate," Rose commented. "People need to know this fundamental skill that not everyone has anymore. Due to mega farms, individual production does not necessarily happen any more. Gardens use to be a way of life to feed families, and that is not the case anymore, but it should not be a lost skill."

Bike Rally Set for This Weekend



"The Fools" will perform at the Arnold Community Center this Saturday starting at 9:30 p.m., as part of the line-up of events for the Devil's Den Bike Rally.

Mountain Man Forms Bond With Arnold Fourth Graders

By Arnold Fourth Grade Teacher Berni Crow

"It warmed my heart, you have a really special group of kids. Thank you, thank you, thank you!" Melvin Harbin, aka North Texas Mountain Man (NTMM) said, after becoming this year's fourth grader pen pal quite by happenstance.

I suppose I'd better start at the beginning... (Husband) Dave and I have a good friend named Rex Jackson. Last summer, he spent several days with us. This time he brought back a handmade knife that had been made by his Texas friend, and I was a tad envious when he gave it to a Nebraska hunting buddy. I nonchalantly told him that I would gladly pay his friend to have a knife of my own. NTMM is a knapper, is very handy at many nature crafts, and makes beautiful knives from antlers, flint, and even glass from Kirkuk Iraq, where he served as a supplies officer.

Well, guess what? On Rex's next visit, that same summer, he brought back a knife for me. I was elated! Neither man would accept money, but Rex asked if I'd tell my fourth graders about his friend and the gift of the knife, and he said that his friend would love hearing from them.

This year's class was an amazing group of kids. Not only did they thank NTMM for the knife given to their teacher, they detailed the fun, exciting things they do at home and at school.



Last year's 17 Arnold fourth graders show rings made out of deer antlers sent to them by their penpal and friend, the North Texas Mountain Man. (Courtesy photo)

Mind you, I have never met NTMM, but by the end of the year, my students and I gained a good friend.

As soon as Melvin had received my students' letters, he gave me a call (his words to me were the very first line of this story). He was so overwhelmed with gratitude, that he wrote an

individual letter to each of my 17 students. Not only that, he told me on the phone that he had something in mind for them, and to keep watching for a box to arrive in the mail.

In a few weeks, we received a box at school with a Texas address. Our friend NTMM had made 18 arrowheads, including

one for me. He even sent each one of them in a cloth pouch. We had 17 extremely happy fourth graders. They asked if they could color their pouches, and of course, they wanted to write him another letter to thank him for their gift. This time, they sent drawings along with their letters. We also sent

photos of the students' hands holding their arrowheads, along with a group photo showing off the bags they'd colored.

In the letter Melvin, aka NTMM, sent me, he said, "When I found the big yellow envelope and told my wife and sons I had another, they all laughed and said, 'Here comes the tears again.' They say I'm getting soft as I get older. It's not the best thing for my North Texas Mountain Man image. I couldn't read their letters for the tears. I've had lots of good things happen to me, but this topped them all."

You guessed it, he sent another round of individual letters and secretly told me that he had another gift planned for his little Nebraska friends. He said, "You are blessed to get to teach them, and such a wonderful person to share a piece of them with me."

About two weeks before school let out for the summer, his second surprise arrived. Once again, each little gift came in its own bag. This time, he'd made 18 rings out of a deer antler. NTMM had cut perfect slices, sanded them, and then stained and varnished them.

We had just enough time to send him one last letter before school was out for the summer. There were some sad students who realized that was probably their third and last letter to our friend, North Texas Mountain Man.