



High school grads and former 4-H'ers Jobe Johns, Blevyns Jumper, Dalton Koenes, Chelsey Alvarado, Kathlynn Kippenberger, Tyra Baker and Preslynn Baker stand with Aaron Stam at the annual Seminole Indian 4-H banquet June 27 in Big Cypress.

BIG CYPRESS — 4-H youth and livestock owners were honored for their commitment to the program June 27 at the annual Seminole Indian 4-H banquet in Big Cypress. The event capped the end of another year that the 4-H'ers raised steer, swine, and small animals while attending school, playing sports, and just being kids.

Polly Hayes has seen a lot of children grow up and learn responsibility during her 20 years as 4-H coordinator.

"I see the different attitudes from when they first come in the program," Hayes said. "I see how they evolve. You can always tell a 4-H kid by their attitude and maturity. The strength of their knowledge rubs off on who they are."

Children may join the 4-H Cloverbud program at age 5 and learn to take care of small animals such as rabbits, ducks, and puppies. By age 8, they have sufficient experience to raise a hog, and at 10 are responsible enough for a steer.



At the annual Seminole Indian 4-H banquet, Mary Jene Koenes accepts the award on behalf of her Diamond K Cattle Company for producing the grand champion steer, which was raised and shown by Nick Andrews. Lonnie Gore presented the award June 27 in Big Cypress.

Looking on is Aaron Stam.

4-H'ers agree to make a long-term commitment to care for the animals while they learn the business of raising livestock for sale. Early morning feedings, daily exercise, and keeping a log of expenses for the animals are some of the requirements of the program.

"I was Miss Polly's 4-H subject all the time," said Hayes' son Hollywood Board Rep. Steve Osceola. "It [4-H] mentored me into leadership roles. This is a great organization; we have one of the strongest ones in the country."

Big Cypress Board Rep. Joe Frank echoed Osceola's praise for Seminole 4-H.

"We raise quality steer, hogs and heifers around and I support 4-H's plans to take it to the next level," he said.

Emcee Aaron Stam thanked Hayes, Florida Cooperative Extension coordinator assistant Lonnie Gore and the many volunteers who made the program successful as he put out the call for more volunteers to step up and donate their time.

"There is no way for 4-H to exist without community members pitching in and getting involved," said Stam, Florida Cooperative Extension agent.

Cattle owners whose animals earned grand champion and reserve champion were presented with awards, as were the 11 high school graduates leaving 4-H. Herdsman awards, which recognizes youth for leadership as well as care and handling of their animals, were given to Camryn Thomas for swine and Lahna Baker for steer.

"They are ambassadors of 4-H," Stam said. "These awards reflect so well on these kids."

The trajectory of Rep. Osceola's life as a business owner and tribal leader was established by his years in 4-H, where he acquired real leadership skills.

"It taught me not to be afraid, to take the reins in a leadership role and take control to get things going in the right direction," he said.

One of 4-H's goals is to prepare youth to enter the cattle program, but that is only one of its objectives.

"Our finished product is not an animal; it's these young people who go on to be productive members of society," Stam said.

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