

Schlais leads 4-H Youth Leader Council

By Pam Chickering Wilson, Union staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, July 8, 2014 8:55 am

SULLIVAN — Pauline Schlais of Concord, a member of the Sullivan Stars 4-H Club, has been elected president of the Wisconsin 4-H Youth Leader Council.

Schlais, 16 at the time of her election June 25, turned 17 on July 1. She attends the Jefferson schools and has been involved in 4-H since she was in the fourth grade.

The Concord girl, who has been a youth leader in Jefferson County for several years, applied for the Wisconsin Youth Leader Council two years ago and was elected to a two-year term. She was among three youth leaders nominated for to run for president of the organization, all of whom had to address the entire conference of youth delegates.

The candidates then were elected by members of the existing Youth Leader Council.

Schlais said in her campaign speech that she talked about being a delegate at the conference in years past and how seeing the youth council in action inspired her to become a youth leader herself, as well as challenging her to help make her own and the statewide 4-H program better. Her term runs through next year's summer conference.

The Wisconsin State 4-H Youth Leader Council aims to strengthen 4-H youth development programs by addressing youth issues, promoting 4-H, providing leadership at the Wisconsin 4-H and Youth Conference, and communicating needs between local and state entities.

An educational program of 4-H Youth Development and University of Wisconsin-Extension, the Youth Leader Council meets three times a year at the state 4-H & Youth Conference, at the Fall Forum and at the Spring Retreat. Besides their role with 4-H & Youth Conference and connection for input into youth issues, council members also work with the Wisconsin 4-H Foundation, Wisconsin State Fair Youth Exhibits Committee, the North Central Volunteer Leader Forum Steering Committee, and other statewide committees and events.

"I'm excited to move forward with the projects we're working on," Schlais said, noting that the council hosts a lot of leadership seminars, helps with the 4-H conference in Madison each year, does a lot of outreach throughout the state, and helps fundraise for 4-H at the state level. The group also plans the 4-H Day at the state fair, which this year will take place Aug. 5.



Pauline Schlais

Schlais personally served on the planning committee for the 4-H Day at the State Capitol this year, which she said drew a lot of people.

She has been in 4-H around eight years.

“Although you can join 4-H as a kindergartner, I didn’t know about 4-H until I was in the fourth grade, and my friend invited me to join her in a meeting and skating party,” Schlais said. “After I met the people, I was pretty much hooked.”

In the years since, she has gotten very involved in club, county and state youth leadership, and has taken advantage of the many opportunities 4-H offers, including regular 4-H camp, leadership conferences and other activities.

“School can be full of cliques, and 4-H is the only place that some people can really be themselves,” Schlais said. “Everyone is really welcoming, and there’s a place for everyone. Everyone can find something they’re interested in, whether it’s engineering, knitting or showing cows.”

In keeping with the modern face of 4-H, Schlais is not a “farm kid,” although there still are many people in 4-H who raise animals, grow crops and do other traditional, agriculture-based projects.

But the club has shifted focus in recent decades to meet the needs of all kids, whether rural, suburban or urban, and to provide opportunities for young people to expand their knowledge whatever their area of interest.

Personally, she has shown dogs, although she no longer is involved in the dog project. She has continued her involvement in lots of other projects, though, including photography, natural sciences, the cultural arts, public speaking and more.

“I write poetry, do drama, play the piano and saxophone, and I really enjoy shooting sports,” Schlais said, mentioning one of the newer projects in Jefferson County which has become very popular in recent years.

She said taking projects to the Jefferson County Fair every year has been very rewarding. Not only does she have the satisfaction of working hard and expanding her knowledge in different areas, but she said the face-to-face judging experience has increased her confidence and ability to express herself over the years.

“I used to be a very shy child, and 4-H has really helped me to be able to speak up,” Schlais said. “My interviewing skills are way ahead of where they would be if I hadn’t been in 4-H ... I think 4-H has really prepared me for the future.”