4-H member sees home environment project as a way to serve others

Young member excited for refinished desk, made for little sister, to go on display at State Fair

By Annika Wiebers, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – As the Kansas State Fair draws near, excitement grows among 4-H youth who are excited to showcase their work to a larger audience. For Bryce VenJohn of Cowley County, his fair project this year was also an opportunity to serve others.

“My mom had planned to refinish [a] desk but she didn't have time so she had asked me if I wanted to try it for my fair project.” VenJohn said. “I was helping out my mom on a project for my little sister. I was also helping out our neighbor, Sandee McDade, who had given us the desk to fix up and use.”

Bryce's mother, Sarah, said part of the uniqueness of this desk is the story behind its age and history.

"(Sandee McDade) received the desk in 1959 for her fourth birthday," Sarah VenJohn said. "Since then she has passed the desk along to family and friends to play with and love, but over time the desk had incurred water damage and was in desperate need of repair."

At his county fair, VenJohn’s hard work paid off and set the stage for his progression to the state level.

“I am very excited to have my desk go to the State Fair,” he said. “This is the first time I've won Grand Champion on any of my projects [at the county fair] so I was just excited for that, but then found out it was State Fair eligible and got really excited to find out I could take it. It's been a few years since we've been to the Kansas State Fair, so I think it will be pretty cool to see my project there.”

VenJohn created a quality end product, but in 4-H, that's only part of the objective. The ultimate goal of a 4-H project is to learn during the process. And VenJohn did just that.
“I learned how to repair a tambour and to use a bar of soap on wood if something doesn’t slide well,” He said. “I learned you can remove rust from metal by soaking it in vinegar and scrubbing with steel wool. I learned to spray wood with a little water when sanding to bring grain to the surface and make the wood super soft. I also learned that I really enjoy refinishing furniture.”

He added: “This project was important to me because it was fun taking it all apart to fix it and because I was doing it for my little sister. It makes me proud of myself to be of service to someone else. It makes me happy to see my sister playing with the desk I fixed up for her.”

More information on opportunities available through Kansas 4-H is available at local extension offices in Kansas.

-30-

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