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Press Release

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COUNTY EXTENSION OFFICE HELPING TO SHAPE THE COMMUNITY

While County Government largely provides only those essential services, County Extension is one department that reaches out to assist Parker County residents young and old alike in molding their community into a better place for all.

The extension office, located at 604 N. Main St. in Weatherford, is part of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service which is a statewide educational agency and a member of the Texas A&M System linked in a unique partnership with County Commissioners Courts throughout the state.

Parker County Extension education provides an opportunity for life long learning through research based information and programs relative to current issues in the areas of: agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H and youth development and community economic development.

These educational efforts are offered by County Extension agents Jon Green, Kathy Smith, and Kayla Neill through seminars, field days, clinics, short courses, training classes, workshops, result demonstrations, newsletters, news articles, office visits, site

visits, phone calls and their web site, which can be found at www.co.parker.tx.us.

"It is a privilege to be able to work with the people of our community to help make Parker County the wonderful place it is and we could not do it without our volunteers," Smith said. "Volunteers who serve on program area committees provide guidance and direction to the educational efforts and other volunteers expand the outreach of Extension through the Master Gardener program, Extension Education Association and 4-H leaders."

The job and responsibilities of a County Extension Agent is not always an 8:00 to 5:00 job. Many times agents begin working setting up for a program or making home visits before 8:00 a.m. and may be conducting an educational program at 7:00 p.m. that may not end until 9:30 p.m. or later.

"While it is hard work, it leads to great rewards," said Neill who gets to work with the children of Parker County involved in 4-H.

4-H

She spends many weekends working with 4-H members at stock shows, conducting workshop for local ag producers, childcare workers, families, or traveling with 4-H members to a district or state event in Vernon and even College Station.

Parker County 4-H is the youth development organization of Texas AgriLife Extension Service. Their purpose is to provide young people in Parker County with the opportunity to learn and develop life skills through hands on learning experiences.

"The youth in this county are our future, and it is our intentions to make every effort to extend the wealth of knowledge and learning available through the Land Grant University System," Neill said.

Parker County 4-H program offers opportunities to all youth including those in both urban and rural situations. The wide assortment of projects and activities available through the 4-H Program allows the 4-Hers to be exposed to a variety of skills that will assist and provide opportunities throughout their future.

The 4-H Program is the world's largest youth organization promoting family and youth development through preventative education. It focuses towards youth ages 8 and in the 3rd grade through the age of 18 to assist in fostering self esteem and self improvement, practicing teambuilding, character and ethical development, motivation and communication.

"Understanding and developing a mutual respect help the youth of Parker County as they learn through hands on experiences taught by both our volunteers and professional staff," Neill said.

More than three hundred and fifty 4-Hers and seventy-one volunteers are enrolled in one of nine clubs in Parker County with members participating in over forty one projects including: livestock, food and nutrition, clothing and textiles, dog care, shooting sports, veterinary science and photography.

4-H also offers curriculum enrichment to public and private schools. More than 8,000 students took part enrichment programming through Toothfully Speaking, Plant Pals, Egg-To-Chick, Emergency Preparedness, Mobile Dairy, Hand Washing: Fighting Germs and Kids, Kows and More.

Neill said local teachers report back every year indicating the programming efforts made by Parker County 4-H Curriculum Enrichment make a true difference in the lives of their students, giving them valuable knowledge while developing life skills and forming attitudes that enable them to become self-directing, and contributing members of society.

Agriculture and Horticulture

In the area of agriculture and horticulture some of the more recent programming efforts have been in water conservation and water quality.

Thanks to the support of the Parker County Commissioners Court and the Master Gardeners installation efforts, a 2,500 gallon rainwater collection tank is collecting rainwater at the Extension office. Rainwater from the roof is used to water the five trial garden/demonstration beds through drip irrigation.

Green said that this project is showing some savings in city water use and costs, provides non-chlorinated water for the plants, and most importantly educates the public on how rainwater can be collected and help conserve our valuable ground water and surface water.

"As water becomes more and more of a concern for Parker county residents, rainwater collection could become an alternative water source," he said.

The Master Gardeners have conducted several rainwater harvesting and drip irrigation workshops the past couple of years. As for water

quality, a Water Well Screening Day was held in December and well owners took advantage of the opportunity to have their well-water screened for fecal coli forms, nitrates, and salinity.

Other recent program efforts in the agriculture/horticulture area have been a well attended seminar to provide continuing education units to local ag producers to assist them in using pesticides safely, a Pond Management Field Day to discuss water quality, fish management and aquatic weed control, Pecan Nut Case Bearer Result Demonstration and a Master Gardener Spring Plant Sale in April and Fall Open House in September and many more.

Green added that the 85 Parker County Master Gardeners and Interns volunteered over 11,000 hours to the local Extension Program in 2009 through their projects, office work, and other educational activities.

"Other programs will be planned and conducted as identified by our program area committees," Green said. "Programs already confirmed for 2010 include an Ag. 201 for Small Acreage Landowners which will be offered to those who have participated in one of the Ag 101 programs over the last 3 years. Also more programs are being scheduled for pasture management and forage production."

Family and Consumer Sciences

Last but not least is the Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) area of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service.

"AgriLife Extension offers practical researched based information and educational programs for families and individuals in Parker

County," Smith said. "We would love to get even more individuals and families involved in our numerous programs so give our office a call at 817-598-6168 and get signed up."

These programs include: parenting, housing and environment, eating well, managing money, and staying healthy. Programs are offered throughout Parker County and many are free of charge to residents. Classes and programs are conducted for individuals, businesses, organizations, worksites, schools and church.

Programs conducted recently and in the past year have included: Diabetes Education - Do Well Be Well with Diabetes II classes and Cooking Well with Diabetes II classes and Food Safety - Certified Food Management Education and Food Handlers and Food Safety Programs. These accredited courses cover food safety essentials for area food service workers.

The Extension office provides a wealth of resources and information to help residents preserve food safely. A workshop was conducted this past summer and will be offered again this summer that provides hands on canning of vegetables and jelly making.

Cooking 101 was the first of many classes that was held this past fall that focused on basic food preparation and food safety for the holidays.

Better Living for Texans is a program that is funded through the Texas Department of Health and Human Services. Johnnie Kelly, the program assistant that works with the program, conducted educational programs and works with the Extension office to reach food stamp and limited resource families. She conducts nutrition programs that help families to stretch food dollars, eat healthy and practice food

safety. Some of the programs that she works with includes:

Weatherford Housing, Texas Work Solutions, HeadStart, Center of Hope, Weatherford I.S.D., Freedom House, Fox Hollow Apartments, Kid's Unite Summer Program are some of the locations classes have been conducted.

Nutrition programs are conducted monthly at the Weatherford Senior Citizens Center and to various organizations throughout Parker County. These programs contain timely topics related to nutrition and health.

In an effort to help local parents, Parker County Extension offers parenting classes at least four times a year that focuses on child development, communication, discipline and self esteem. The classes are conducted along with nutrition workshops.

Child Care Provider Training Classes have been conducted through evening 2 hour classes and through weekend workshops. They offer continuing education hours to child care providers on various topics and all are recognized in compliance with the Texas Department of Human Services and child care licensing.

Other programs include: Where Do I Start, a program that focuses on job readiness. The workshop series offers information to individuals on job applications, resumes, job interviews, looking your best, Home water Conservation Classes, Sewing Workshops, Financial Management Classes and the Extension Education Clubs and Association, which is the adult sister program to 4-H program. The organized clubs meet monthly from September through May for education and fellowship focusing on various topics. The clubs support community endeavors and provides scholarships to 4-H members. The Texas AgriLife Extension Service works closely with the clubs in the

county to provide educational program and support. There are currently three clubs, with hopes of more being organized.

For more information on Parker County Extension contact the office at 817-598-6168 or visit their web site at <http://parker-tx.tamu.edu/> or the county's web site at www.co.parker.tx.us.

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