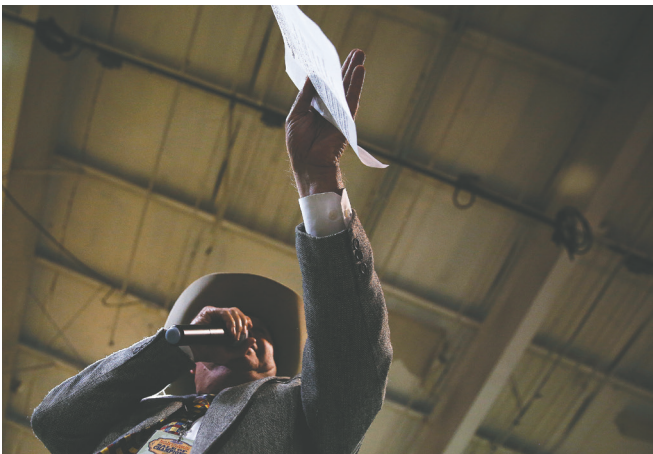


N.C. State Fair | Raleigh

Friendships forged through agriculture



Auctioneer E.B. Harris of Warrenton yells during the N.C. State Fair Junior Livestock Sale of Champions. Harris has been the auctioneer for the event for nearly a decade.



CHRISTINE T. NGUYEN | NORTH STATE JOURNAL

From left, Adam Hoffman, 15, Hunter Weddington, 16, and Gabe Simon, 16, relax with their cows after taking part in a State Fair livestock competition. The high school students are part of the Bandy's Livestock FFA in Catawba.

For those concerned over the average age of a farmer, or worried about what the youth of America are doing with their time, you need only make your way to the Jim Graham building the first Saturday of the North Carolina State fair

By **Jennifer Wood**
North State Journal

COWS, KIDS, and country music bumping behind impromptu line dancing in the stalls at the Jim Graham building are the order of business on Friday night. These youth livestock exhibitors are here to compete in their Super Bowl of market shows and sales.

"These kids have worked hard to get here," said Shannon Vanhoy, Catawba County FFA Advisor at Bandy's High School. "We have 26 members and some are suburban kids from non-traditional agriculture households, if there's ever a learning curve you can be sure they make it up in hard work."

Some of these youth exhibitors are involved in 4-H, some are members of the Future Farmers of America organization, and some represent their family farm — but they have all reached this stage with their animal because they won at the local level and understand the concept of dedication and hard work.

On Saturday Bandy's FFA group won the inaugural Junior Herdsman Award. The award recognizes participants for responsible behavior and quality work while taking care of their animals at the fair. Even with the boot scoot boogie going on in the background while I talk with the young people in this group, it is easy to see why they were recognized for this award. No one in the Bandy's FFA group ever mentions the accolade.

The exhibitors are looking forward to their own shows and many have added a component to their weekend by volunteering to participate in the livestock special show.

The special show is a livestock event where youth exhibitors are paired with people with special needs of all ages and abilities with the goal of sharing the joyful experience of being with an animal in the show ring at the



Ringman Bruce Shankle, center, calls out a bid during the N.C. State Fair Junior Livestock Sale of Champions. A portion of the sale goes to education scholarships.

Melinda Boyd, 21, of Pinetown prepares to show off Sioux, who was named supreme grand champion overall female junior beef heifer.



siblings, one pair from Stanly County and one from Guilford County. They are soft spoken, but no less enthusiastic about their volunteer involvement. Mattie and Marcie Harward are twins from Stanly County and both are eager to participate. "I volunteer because it's fun to have the opportunity to share agriculture with someone who might not have the chance to be exposed to it," said Mattie Harward. "Absolutely, it's a great part of the fair experience for us," echoes Marcie Harward.

Cara Smith and her brother Thomas Smith are from Guilford County and they reflect that same sentiment

In fact, Thomas Smith has been paired with the same partner for five years, "I enjoy volunteering, it gives kids a way to be around livestock," said Thomas Smith. "Some of the participants have never been around animals. My partner was afraid of them to begin with, but not anymore."

The entire time I sat with these

state fair.

Sarah Faith McAllister lights up when asked about her participation. "I found out today that I'm paired with Phil," beamed Sarah. "Last year my sister was partnered with Phil and he is just the nicest man, he makes everyone around him feel important. When I got the card with Phil's name I was so happy." McAllis-

ter will accompany Phil Bagwell around the show ring with her immaculately groomed black angus cow on Saturday. McAllister's excitement is contagious and her friends pile in to share how much everyone loves Phil along with their own excitement about being a part of the event.

Quietly seated adjacent to the Bandy's FFA group are a crop of

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