Beyond Ready for the Future

Indiana 4-H Round-Up and Indiana 4-H Academy help prepare youth for what's ahead

INDIANA 4-H FOUNDATION

Beyond Ready

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- Ripley County gets a new endowment
- Meet our premier scholarship recipients

Summertime Learning & Exploration

4-H Round-Up (grades 7 & 8) and **4-H Academy** (grades 9-12) are beloved summer traditions in Indiana 4-H, offering in-depth career exploration sessions for youth where participants engage in exciting, hands-on, interactive activities and experiential learning, as well as panel discussions and networking events.

In June 2026, the events were hosted simultaneously for the first time and supported by university faculty, graduate students, extension educators, and local professionals. A wide variety of subjects and professions were covered during these sessions, made possible by generous gifts from **Farm Credit Mid-America** and **Corteva Agriscience**.

From Junior Leader to Emerald Clover

4-H supporter reflects on an enriching experience and 30 years of greatest need giving

Long before Bowen Akers was old enough to enroll as a 4-H member himself, he accompanied his father, a Putnam County 4-H leader, as he visited members to check on their projects before the county fair. Watching those interactions sparked a love for 4-H that would shape the course of his life.

When it was finally his turn to join, Bowen was determined to make the most of the opportunity. His family didn't own livestock, so they found an unused barn in Greencastle where he raised his first pig. By his second year, his father and grandfather decided to expand the family's involvement by purchasing Angus cattle. Those cattle would become the foundation for years of hard work, competition, and success.

"We were fortunate to add some really nice stock," Bowen recalled. "We won a lot of ribbons over the years."

While the ribbons were rewarding, Bowen learned practical skills that would serve him for decades. Whether working on electrical projects, caring for livestock, or preparing exhibits for the county and state fairs, he discovered that success came through persistence and preparation.

"4-H taught me that if you worked at it, you could take anything and make the best better," he said.

"I want to give 4-H the maximum flexibility. They know best where the money is needed." - Bowen Akers, annual Greatest Need donor since 1996

During his 10 years in 4-H, Bowen served as president of his local club—the first leadership position of many—and later was elected president of the Junior Leaders organization. That role led to an appointment on the Governor's Youth Council, where he developed an even deeper appreciation for community service.

Bowen also attended 4-H Round-Up in Chicago where hundreds of 4-Hers from across the country gathered to learn, share ideas, and create lasting memories, including one unforgettable lunchtime surprise performance by singer Pat Boone.

In 1958, Bowen was selected as a National 4-H Citizenship Award recipient and as one of only six young people chosen for the National 4-H Report to the Nation program in Washington, D.C., where he met with members of Congress and then-Vice President Richard Nixon.

"It was quite an experience," Bowen said. "It made me think about getting involved in other organizations later in life."

Bowen Akers (above) served in many leadership roles, including president of Putnam County Junior Leaders.

Following graduation from Purdue University—with the help of a 4-H scholarship that assisted with his tuition—Bowen began a 35-year career with IBM. Starting in manufacturing at the company's Greencastle facility after serving in the U.S. Army, his career evolved into several leadership roles spanning all facets of the business. Wherever IBM took him, Bowen found ways to serve his community. Looking back, he credits 4-H with giving him the confidence and leadership skills to step into each of those roles.

For Bowen, giving back also means supporting Indiana 4-H programs with greatest need donations, and every gift is an expression of gratitude.

"I want to give 4-H the maximum flexibility," he said. "They know best where the money is needed."

An annual donor since 1996 and a current member of the Foundation's Emerald Clover Giving Club, Bowen sees the value of allowing the organization to use his gifts where support is needed most.

"4-H gave me a lot," he said. "It's important to me to honor the incredible impact 4-H had on my life."

His story is a powerful reminder that the lessons learned through 4-H last far beyond a project, a fair, or even a decade of membership. Through leadership, service, and generosity, Bowen continues to live the values he first learned as a young 4-H member in Putnam County—and he wants to ensure future generations have the opportunity to do the same.

To help support Indiana 4-H through greatest need giving, visit our website at **in4h.org/donate**.

A Gift from the Heart

Ripley County 4-H receives generous endowment to fund greatest needs

Dale Koester's connection to 4-H began on his family's farm near Batesville, Indiana, where hard work was a way of life. Long before sunrise, he milked cows, fed chickens, and helped keep the family farm running, all before heading off to school.

Growing up, Dale participated in both 4-H and FFA, and over the years, he showed sheep, beef cattle, swine, poultry at the Franklin County Fair. In addition to showing livestock, he also completed gardening, forestry, wildlife and electrical projects. And though he enjoyed all of his projects, raising and showing sheep remains his favorite.

"Caring for animals taught me a lot of responsibility," Dale said. In fact, Dale considers responsibility the greatest lesson 4-H taught him. "Caring for animals required daily commitment and discipline, qualities that stayed with me for a long time after my participation in 4-H ended."

Dale Koester (above) with a plaque commemorating the establishment of the Ripley County endowment.

His memories of 4-H are filled with both hard work and moments of laughter. He recalls hauling sheep to the county fair during a torrential rainstorm after the truck's windshield wipers quit working, forcing his brother to stick his head out the window to see the road. He also remembers friendly competitions with fellow Junior Leaders, including seeing who could eat the most ice cream at the county fair.

Those experiences created friendships and memories that have lasted a lifetime.

After high school, Dale began to work on the family farm full-time. When his father became ill and later passed away, Dale assumed responsibility for managing the farm, eventually transitioning from dairy to beef cattle.

After selling the farm in 2024, Dale reflected on ways that he could support organizations in his community. Dale worked with a financial advisor to ensure his charitable gifts would benefit organizations close to his heart and create a favorable tax outcome. 4-H was one of the first options that came to mind.

Dale Koester (right) established the endowment for Ripley County in loving memory of his late wife, Marian (left).

"It was very important to both me and my late wife, Marian, who had participated in 4-H in Kentucky when she was younger," Dale shared.

And so, in 2025, Dale generously established the Dale and Marian Koester 4-H Program Endowment for Ripley County through the Indiana 4-H Foundation. The endowment will provide income for the county program to use in perpetuity for its greatest needs as the program evolves. He hopes the endowment will help ensure future generations of young people can experience the same opportunities he and Marian did.

"Dale and Marian have always had a heart for the Ripley County Community. This 4-H endowment is a perfect example of their heart," said David Osborne, Extension professional from Ripley County.

This gift will create lasting opportunities for Ripley County 4-H youth, ensuring that the values of responsibility, hard work and service that shaped Dale and Marian's lives will continue to influence generations of 4-H members for years to come.

If you're interested in establishing a county endowment or would like to help grow an existing one, reach out to Indiana 4-H Foundation Executive Director Shelly Bingle at shelly@in4h.org.

Did You Know?

As of 2026, the Indiana 4-H Foundation has approximately $2.8 million invested in a total of 68 endowments for county programs and scholarships. You can read more on our website at in4h.org/endowments.

YES Grants in Action

Keeping Nature in the Neighborhood

Marion County 4-Her Lydia Sica spent this spring and summer educating her community about the importance of native plants for pollinators, thanks to an Indiana 4-H Foundation YES Grant.

"I have listened to many educational talks about different wildlife species including amphibians, birds, and bees. These animals along with others, are losing their habitat," Lydia said. "By providing native seeds I wish to encourage and educate people about creating a small habitat in their yard. This will help multiple species of wildlife."

Lydia set up a booth at a Community Day event in Garfield Park sponsored by the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department. Event goers who stopped by Lydia's table were treated to an interactive presentation with trivia questions about pollinators and a seed planting demonstration. They left with a free plant, seeds, grow bag, and a printed sheet with more facts about the topic. Lydia purchased the supplies with funds from the YES Grant.

Learn more about YES Grants at in4h.org/grants

"During the project, I was surprised at the positive feedback I received," Lydia said. "I am grateful that many people learned about different topics and appreciated my project. I hope the people who took my plants will have the desire to venture outside, start a new hobby, or renew an old one that doesn't involve electronics."

After the IMPD event, Lydia had enough supplies to set up information tables at St. Francis Farmers Market and Farm Hand 101 Fair. She was encouraged by the entirely positive feedback from others in the community, including one neighbor who told her, "You are going to change the world!"

"All of these connections were good opportunities to engage and network with different communities around Indianapolis," Lydia said. "I feel like meeting these new people and engaging with them made my project a success and may lead to other opportunities. I definitely enjoyed serving the community and learned I can overcome challenges."

YES Grants Program: Latest News & Updates

As our YES Grants program grows, we are making a few changes that will help provide youth with a positive experience as they pursue their goals in leading community service projects:

New Timeline

We are shifting the timeline for the 2027 application process to open a few months earlier. Please note there will be a slight overlap as 2026 YES grant recipients will be wrapping up your 2026 reports and potentially, simultaneously applying for a 2027 grant.

The new timeline is as follows:

- 2027 Application portal opens September 15, 2026
- 2027 Application portal closes December 15, 2026
- 2026 Final reports due December 15, 2026
- 2027 YES Grants awarded January 15, 2027
- 2027 Final reports due August 15, 2027

New Software

We are piloting new software from AwardSpring that will hopefully make the application and reporting processes easier to navigate. It is important that as the youth lead, you use your own personal email address (not a school email address) to sign up for a user account on AwardSpring. This same account will be used to apply for scholarships in 2027 and beyond, so please be sure you have your own account. No application should be submitted using an adult account.

Like in past years, the application portal will be linked from our YES Grants webpage at in4h.org/grants once it opens on September 15.

Email us at yesgrants@in4h.org with any questions about the YES Grants program.

The 2026 YES Grants were funded by Corteva Agriscience and Rural 1st by Farm Credit.

This year, 48 projects from 33 counties across the state received a total of $46,000 in YES Grants funding:

Allen	Howard	Sullivan
Blackford	Jasper	Tippecanoe
Boone	Johnson	Union
Clinton	Lawrence	Vanderburgh
DeKalb	Madison	Vigo
Fayette	Marion	Wabash
Fountain	Marshall	Warren
Hancock	Monroe	Warrick
Harrison	Montgomery	Washington
Hendricks	Morgan	Wayne
Henry	Putnam	Wells

Learn more about the Indiana 4-H Foundation YES Grants program at in4h.org/grants

You're Invited!

2026 INDIANA 4-H FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP LUNCHEON

Join us as we honor our Accomplishment Scholarship recipients at the Foundation's annual premier event! All Indiana 4-H members, volunteers, supporters, friends, and family are welcome to attend and enjoy the festivities with this impressive group of future Hoosier leaders. Lunch provided by Jonathan Byrd's catering.

WHEN:
Saturday, November 7, 2026

WHERE:
502 East: Jonathan Byrd's Events & Catering
502 East Carmel Drive, Carmel, Indiana

RSVP BY OCTOBER 20, 2026:
Register online at in4h.org/luncheon-rsvp
or email us at info@in4h.org

Scholarship Application Training & Career Readiness Session

Prior to the luncheon, we are offering a training session for youth and educators to learn more about applying for 4-H scholarships, writing a professional resume, and exploring career paths. Trainees and their guests will receive a discounted ticket to stay for the luncheon and EARLY ACCESS to the 2027 scholarship application!

This year, 45 Indiana 4-Hers will receive Accomplishment Scholarships, including our Premier Scholarship winners:

Hannah Early
MIAMI COUNTY

Premier Achievement Scholarship

sponsored by Allen and Sherer Families in Memory of Janet Allen

Emma Smith
MONROE COUNTY

Premier Civic Engagement Scholarship

sponsored by Corteva Agriscience

Jaylynn Goodwin
MONROE COUNTY

Premier Leadership Scholarship

sponsored by Indiana State Fair Commission

Special thanks to this year's event sponsors:

RURAL 1st by Farm Credit · CountryMark · CORTEVA agriscience · HALDERMAN · PREMIER Companies · The Andersons · OLD NATIONAL

Show Your Clover Pride!

Order Your Indiana 4-H Foundation License Plate

2026 marks the 30th anniversary of the Indiana 4-H Foundation specialty license plate!

Indiana 4-H Foundation license plates are an investment in 4-H youth. $10 from every plate sold goes directly to support 4-H in the county where it was purchased, and $15 from every plate sold is used for statewide 4-H programming.

In 2025, a total of 2,472 4-H license plates were sold across Indiana, in all 92 counties, raising a total of $61,800 in funding for Indiana 4-H youth.

Request your license plate at bmv.in.gov or at your local BMV branch

Website: in4h.org **Email: info@in4h.org** **Follow us on social media:**

Support Indiana 4-H in Style

SHOP

Looking for the perfect gift for a 4-H member, alumni, or supporter? Maybe you just need a fun new t-shirt or mug? Check out what we've added to the Indiana collection on Shop 4-H!

in4h.org/shop

Don't Let Your IRA Benefit Expire!

Looking for a fresh way to reduce your taxes? An IRA charitable rollover allows you to avoid taxes when you transfer funds from your IRA directly to a charity like the Indiana 4-H Foundation.

If you are 70 1/2 or older and own an IRA, you can transfer up to $111,000 this year to count toward your required distribution. Best of all, an IRA rollover gift is an easy way to help further our mission. To learn more, contact your IRA administrator or visit our website at in4h.org/IRA-rollover

INDIANA 4-H FOUNDATION

Roger Sherer, President
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Christy Denault, Past President
Shelly Bingle, Executive Director

PURDUE UNIVERSITY

Partnered with:
Purdue Extension specialists and 4-H youth development professionals who deliver educational programs to Indiana 4-H youth.

Purdue Extension 4-H Youth Development Program

Dr. Angie Abbott
Associate Dean and Director of Purdue Extension

Dr. Danielle Lay
Indiana State 4-H Program Co-Leader