Willis named Oklahoma 4-H Lifetime Volunteer of the Year

Even though she did not grow up as a 4-Her, Rachel Willis has certainly made her mark on the Oklahoma 4-H Program as an adult.

Her hard work and dedication were recognized recently when she was named the Oklahoma 4-H Lifetime Volunteer of the Year. Willis received this prestigious honor during the 2015 4-H Parent-Volunteer Conference that took place at Oklahoma State University. This award is presented to individuals who have been a 4-H volunteer leader for more than 10 years.

In addition to being named the Oklahoma 4-H Lifetime Volunteer of the Year, Willis also was named the Southeast District Lifetime Volunteer of the Year.

"I'm totally humbled by this honor," said Willis, who has served as the Canadian 4-H Club leader for 13 years. "We've had winners before from Pittsburg County and I wouldn't put myself in that category, but I'm so pleased with this honor."

Greg Owen, OSU Cooperative Extension 4-H educator in Pittsburg County, said Willis has been an important part of 4-H efforts in the county.

"Rachel has made a huge impact on Pittsburg County, Southeast District, Oklahoma 4-H and national 4-H through her continued efforts as a club leader for the past 13 years," Owen said. "Her students have received numerous state and national honors through her guidance. She is so well adored she is known statewide in the 4-H circle as Mama Willis."

Mike Carter, also a 4-H educator in Pittsburg County, echoes those sentiments.

"I've worked with volunteers for more than 20 years in three different counties. Rachel is on a very short list of elite people who understands her role as a club leader and goes beyond that to encourage youth to be their best," Carter said. "She has made me a better 4-H educator."

Although Willis said she enjoys all aspects of being a 4-H leader, she most enjoys seeing the evolution of her club members.

"I love seeing the kids mature throughout their 4-H years, especially in leadership roles," she said. "These skills have proven to be helpful in the job market after college."

Willis has seen many of her club members achieve successful 4-H careers. Some of her club members have served as delegates to National 4-H Congress, Citizenship Washington Focus, Denver Western Roundup and National 4-H Conference. One club member, who happens to be her daughter, is the only Oklahoma 4-H'er to receive the National 4-H Youth in Action Award. Her club members also have served as State 4-H Ambassadors, Pittsburg County Ambassadors and been inducted into the Pittsburg County 4-H Hall of Fame.

She has served as vice president for the Pittsburg County Volunteer Leader Council, camp chaperone and 4-H Job Readiness contest host. She also is instrumental in county fund-raising efforts and community service projects.

When she is not working with her 4-H Club, Willis teaches high school and middle school English and Spanish, as well as teaches Sunday school, serves as church pianist and is a licensed minister.

For more information about this and other 4-H events and activities please give us a call at the office at 918 423-4120 or email me at greg.owen@okstate.edu.