



## The 100-Year-Old Four Leaf Clover

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

One hundred years ago, the beginnings of 4-H in Texas started sprouting in Jack County, the idea of an extension agent named Thomas Marks. 4-H clubs have been thriving ever since, helping convey to young people the values that have made our state great.

Marks had been trying to promote new agricultural techniques to area farmers. Frustrated with the response, he declared, “Next year I will work with the pups.” He founded the Jack County Boy’s Corn Club in 1908 to teach 25 young men about modern uses of the land and traditional values.

Within a short time, inspired volunteers founded pig clubs and beef calf clubs in Coleman County, girls’ tomato clubs in Milam County, and a vegetable garden and poultry club for black youth in Waller County. It all eventually became 4-H, a phenomenal four-leaf clover that today counts more than 625,000 members statewide and some 40,000 adult volunteers. The Texas program is the largest in the United States.

This centennial year is a good time to highlight the contributions and transformation of Texas 4-H. The 4-H Pledge spells out each of the H’s in its clover emblem: “I pledge my Head to clearer thinking, my Heart to greater loyalty, my Hands to larger service, my Health to better living. For my club, my community, my country, and my world.”

In 4-H, young people across Texas learn practical lessons that help make them successful in life, including leadership skills, communication and public speaking. More importantly, the clubs stress values that are the foundation of good citizenship—honesty, hard work, individual responsibility and service to the community. In competitions, 4-Hers learn to lose—and win—with grace. The organization builds character, the most important lesson of all.

At first, 4-H was mostly about farm life. Just eight years after the first club started, according to 4-H history, the “Texas Farm Boys’ 4-H Special, an eight-car train, traveled 5,000 miles in 16 days carrying 125 farm boys through the best agricultural sections of the United States and Canada for a thorough study of agriculture.”

As Texas has changed and become more urban, so has 4-H. The organization prides itself on adapting to the evolving interests and needs of young Texans.

- All of Texas’ 254 counties have 4-H programs. Two of our most populous counties, Harris (Houston) and Bexar (San Antonio), each have more than twenty 4-H clubs.
- About 70 percent of 4-H members now live in cities, suburbs and towns; 23 percent live in smaller towns or non-farm areas; and seven percent live on farms.
- More than half of the members are female.
- High school programs remain popular, but 4-H starts early. More than 62,000 Texas kindergarteners are enrolled in 4-H programs.
- Operation Military Kids reaches an important part of our state, more than 14,000 young people.

Today more than half a million 4-Hers participate in science, engineering and technology projects. Members of the 4-H statewide Tech Team, for example, use satellite technology to map walking trails, historical sites and, in coastal areas, evacuation routes. Young people in the 4-H “Kidz with Biz Ideaz” program learn workplace skills and even start small businesses.

The organization benefits from its status as the youth development program of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service under Texas A&M and Prairie View A&M Universities.

Through the years, as 4-H has helped young people achieve their goals and become better citizens, the entire state of Texas has been the beneficiary. The next time you see a Texas 4-H member or one of their adult volunteers, tell them to keep up their great work. Let’s make certain the second 100 years of 4-H is as successful as the first.

*Sen. Cornyn serves on the Armed Services, Judiciary and Budget Committees. In addition, he is Vice Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Ethics. He serves as the top Republican on the Judiciary Committee’s Immigration, Border Security and Refugees subcommittee and the Armed Services Committee’s Airland subcommittee. Cornyn served previously as Texas Attorney General, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Bexar County District Judge. For Sen. Cornyn’s previous Texas Times columns: [www.cornyn.senate.gov/column](http://www.cornyn.senate.gov/column)*