

# Learning to do by doing

>> 4-H Leader and now President of Manitoba 4-H Council, Candace Tolton puts her money where her mouth is

**BRENDA HUNTER**  
for Crossroads This Week

Candace Tolton of Kenton has literally taken the 4-H motto of 'Learn to Do by Doing' to heart, working her way up the ranks to become the president of the Manitoba 4-H Council in June of 2019.

Tolton's own road to becoming involved in 4-H began 15 years ago when her eldest daughter, Brooke, turned nine and was old enough to join their local multi-purpose 4-H club, the Kenton Kraftsmen.

"Fifteen years ago, (my husband) Sean and I decided it was time for the fifth generation of Toltons to start 4-H," recalled Tolton. "We enrolled Brooke in the Kenton 4-H club, and that year I became a leader."

Tolton was hooked from the onset. She committed to 4-H and became head leader of the club 13 years ago, but her passion didn't stop there. She eventually was nominated and subsequently elected as director to the Manitoba 4-H Council, became president of South Parkland area council before being elected by the Board of Directors of Manitoba 4-H as president-elect and now president. All four of their children have been active members in 4-H.

Tolton said that her job as president of Manitoba 4-H Council is to not only represent Manitoba 4-H at local, regional, and national events, but also to provide leadership and guide the organization into the future.

"As president it is my job to steer the organization towards a sustainable future by adopting sound, ethical and legal governance and financial management policies, as well as making sure the non-profit has adequate resources to advance our mission."

What is shocking to find out is that Tolton is actually relatively new to the 4-H world. Having grown up in Brandon, she didn't even know that 4-H existed, let

alone what it was all about until about 25 years ago.

"To be honest, I'd never heard of 4-H until I moved to Kenton, which is very disappointing," related Tolton. "For this reason, one of my missions is to try and get the word out about what an amazing program 4-H is and that you don't have to be from a rural community to be in 4-H."

It seems to be a bit of a myth that 4-H is exclusive to rural areas. Perhaps this is due to its roots in the agricultural sector, or maybe it is that urbanites have access to a greater selection of activities to participate in. However, Tolton is working hard to change this mindset as she believes that 4-H is such a worthy organization and important to shaping the future of Canada.

"4-H is very important to me because I know we are building youth to become future leaders; the skills these kids learn are amazing!" she said enthusiastically. "The communication sector is definitely my passion; teaching kids to public speak is a skill that I know will lead them to success."

4-H alumni are the proof of the 4-H program's success. Many top government officials and business leaders across the province and country have 4-H experience in their background. Included in this group is former McConnell 4-H Beef Club member, business entrepreneur, Order of Canada recipient, Director of 4-H Canada, and newly inducted Honorary Member of 4-H Canada, Kim McConnell, who now resides in Okotoks, AB.

"I loved being a 4-H member," said McConnell passionately about his days as a member of the McConnell Club. It has origins dating back to 1922 and has now been recognized as the longest continuous serving 4-H Club in Canada. From the time he could join at eight years old until he graduated



Candace Tolton, 4-H President of Manitoba, speaks at a Kenton Kraftsmen achievement night

high school, McConnell reflected on his formative years in 4-H and how it helped shape his future.

He credits 4-H for his development and growth as a person, his contributions to his community and how it played an instrumental role in providing a foundation for his business career.

"4-H taught me how to public speak, how to run a meeting, how to conduct myself in an interview, and the discipline to complete projects. It also was a critical component of my economic situation as the monies I made from my 4-H calf were my spending money as a kid, and also helped pay for university tuition. And I suspect it provided me the confidence I needed to set up my own

CONTINUED ON P16-B

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-CANDACE TOLTON



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15-B | **LEARNING TO DO BY DOING**

The business he refers to is AdFarm, a marketing communications agency with operations throughout North America. He feels very strongly about the values, commitment, and integrity that 4-H teaches, and it undoubtedly spilled over into his business life.

"Over the years, we have hired many people," McConnell professed, "and when we saw 4-H on their resume, they automatically got an interview."

He continued, "I find it interesting to look at the backgrounds of many of the leaders in our agricultural industry today - political, business and industry. The vast majority of them will have a background in 4-H."

"4-H is undisputedly the most effective positive youth leadership program in Canada."

According to the 4-H Canada website, "...we offer innovative, youth-centred programs that provide meaningful, positive experiences designed to build confidence, positive self-identity, self-esteem, and a sense of achievement." It is the 4-H mission and vision "to empower youth to be responsible, caring and contributing leaders that effect positive change in the world around them" and to produce "thriving

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-KIM McCONNELL

communities in partnership with youth leaders."

One of the world's largest youth organizations with a presence in over 70 countries, 4-H in Canada continues to maintain a steady membership at around 24,000 with another 7,600 volunteers, despite a dwindling rural population.

According to Shannon Benner, CEO of 4-H Canada, it is thanks to a wide selection of projects, both traditional and non-traditional that appeal to a wider range of kids, as well as its stellar reputation as a highly respected and positive influence of youth across the country and the world.

She estimates that 50 to 60 percent of members are still from the rural areas, but that 30 percent are suburban, and 10 percent are urban, which means that even though 4-H has roots in the agricultural sector, it is making an impact in cities as well.

Over the years, 4-H has seen many changes including most notably, the change in member age range from the original 10 to 16 years to now including youth from six to 25. Another significant change is the transition from Manitoba Agriculture involvement to Manitoba 4-H Council assuming full responsibility and leadership.

Project choices have

evolved to embrace and include technology and better reflect today's interests and needs. The most recent change taking place in July of 2019 was the addition of the words "and my world" to the end of the 4-H pledge to align with the impact today's youth leaders have on the world around us and also the broadened 4-H perspective to include international values and travel.

Roland, MB is recognized as the birthplace of 4-H in Canada and it all started in 1913 with what was then called the Boys and Girls Club, later named 4-H in 1951. Kenton Boys and Girls Club began just two years

later in 1915 and according to Tolton, included members from Kenton, Lenore and Harding districts.

The Kenton Kraftsmen 4-H Club as it is known today has been in existence for over 40 years, although its beginnings can be traced back even further. According to the Kenton History Book, a 4-H Home Economics Club was first organized in Kenton in 1952 as a sewing club only, and as a result, only girls participated. As membership dwindled in the 70's, the club took a hiatus for five years, coming back with fervor in 1977 boasting the new name and offering various projects for both boys and girls.

Tolton reports that nowadays their club is very active, with a current membership of 24 hailing from Kenton, Hamiota, Crandall and Virden areas. They are the only youth organization left in Kenton and take an active role in the community and beyond. As an example, and to reinforce the third "H" of the 4-H pledge "my hands to larger service", each year just prior to Christmas, the club spends the day volunteering at the Samaritan House and Helping Hands soup kitchen in Brandon.

"I believe if children are taught at a young age how to

make a difference in the lives of others, it just becomes a part of their adult lives," she said passionately. "And this theory has proven true; I have witnessed former members becoming the lead of volunteer groups in the adult world."

Tolton feels very fortunate to have 'found' 4-H and to have the opportunity to help deliver the message about what 4-H is all about and contribute to molding young minds to be future leaders across the country.

"There are so many volunteer jobs in communities, but to volunteer with the youth I feel is the most important," said Tolton passionately. "I feel so lucky to have that opportunity to help young people be and become the best version of themselves. Today's youth are an amazing generation!"

"I have had the opportunity to watch many members start as shy young children and have watched them grow into strong confident adults who are leaders in our communities," she added. "We cannot prepare the future for our youth, but we can prepare our youth for the future."

*Brenda Hunter is a freelance writer based out of Virden, MB.*

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