

Turning a corner after pandemic

Morgan County 4-H is on the rebound 5 years on from COVID-19 pandemic

By Jared Quigg
MCC Reporter

MORGAN COUNTY — Five years ago, when the world shut down and everyone sheltered inside their homes, many of the recreational activities we were accustomed to enjoying were closed off to us.

We took our meals, watched movies, went to work and school, exercised — all from home, away from others. It was a difficult time for everyone. Restaurants shuttered, athletes performed in empty stadiums and test scores dropped significantly.

The pandemic touched just about everyone in some way, not least of all Indiana 4-H.

For more than 100 years, children and teens have taken what they’ve learned from 4-H and used it to become great communicators, leaders



Vehicles line the Merchant Building at the Morgan County Fairgrounds last October as the Morgan County 4-H Junior Leaders host their annual Trunk or Treat. (Stephen Crane photo / MCC)

and volunteers within their communities. And while the pandemic certainly put a dent in Indiana 4-H’s numbers, five years on and 4-H

community club growth is rising, including in Morgan County.

“We’ve turned a corner,” said Purdue Extension-Morgan County

educator Rena Sheldon this week. “We lost quite a few members in 2020. During Covid, we all got lazy. People weren’t committing time to anything at all.”

Sheldon said Morgan County 4-H has made great efforts to recruit new members over the past few years, with the local chapter consisting of about 450 members. These efforts have included starting a brand new club at Mooresville Christian Academy, and a variety of initiatives designed to both serve those in the community and attract new members.

The junior leaders — those between 7th and 12th grade — also organized a number of events last year, including a successful Trunk-or-Treat event, a pet parade and a showmanship round robin, to name a few. Sheldon said events like these have gone a long way in getting

young children interested in being involved with 4-H.

Morgan County 4-H will put on such events again this year, along with a host of others.

Near the end of this month, on April 26, 4-H members will host a vaccination clinic for dogs and cats at the fairgrounds from 8 a.m. until noon. Sheldon expects around 200 animals will receive vaccinations and other care at this event.

In the evening of April 26, there will be a feed auction, with all the proceeds going to the 4-H Council.

“This is a great program for our kids,” Sheldon said. “Our goal is to produce responsible adults when they graduate from this program. 4-H really builds their ownership of the community they live in.”



SWCD honors local conservation efforts

By Lisa MacPhee
Morgan County SWCD

MORGAN COUNTY — The Morgan County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) recently held its annual meeting and awards banquet.

Besides conducting the official business of electing a supervisor and presenting annual reports, SWCD recognized several individuals and businesses for their efforts in conservation right here in Morgan County. SWCD also recognized the Morgan County 4-H Junior Leaders and the Martinsville FFA for their year’s achievements and outstanding service at the annual meeting.

A short documentary was shared about the amazing work being done in the Big Pine watershed in Northern Indiana, called “Land Values”, produced by Indiana Humanities before the night was concluded.

If you would like to know more about the programs available or how you can help locally to conserve and improve natural resources, reach out to the Morgan County SWCD through their website: www.MorganCountySWCD.org.

Indiana River Friendly Farmer

The Pryor family has cared for their land for more than 30 years. Through the help of the Natural Resource Conservation Services Environmental Quality Incentives Program, they have recently completed their third year of invasive brush management and are currently completing forest stand improvement on 12.7 acres.

They are improving forest and native plant species, and providing better habitat in the West Fork Clear Creek watershed.

Indiana River Friendly Farmer

The Peine Farm has been in the family since 1969. The Peines appreciate the recreational benefits and wildlife habitat that healthy ecosystems can provide. One hundred and ninety-seven acres of the farm is in a conservation easement, and they are working hard to improve and



The Pryor family is given the Indiana River Friendly Farmer award for their work improving habitat in the West Fork Clear Creek watershed. (SWCD courtesy photo)



Tim and Lisa Surber are honored by SWCD's David Mow with the Friends of Conservation Award for their help raising awareness about conservation through Martinsville Neighbors magazine. (SWCD courtesy photo)

add more to the easement in hopes of protecting it for future generations.

Work includes controlling invasive plant species, improving timber areas, minimal tillage systems and cover crop usage on agricultural land. Tree plantings, native grassland, and pollinator habitats can be found throughout the property. The Peines host field days, tours, and even university research projects on the farm.

All this work has improved the water quality of the streams passing through the farm and downstream into Lamb’s Creek.

Environmental Educator of the Year

Christa Mathews currently teaches science classes at John R. Wooden Middle School in Martinsville and believes that “the more students learn about our Earth, hopefully the more they will appreciate it as well as see it as their responsibility to help take care of it for themselves and future generations.”



The Morgan County 4-H Junior Leaders and the Martinsville FFA are recognized for their year’s achievements and outstanding service at the annual meeting. (SWCD courtesy photo)

Christa frequently gets her students outdoors and makes sure they receive environmental education as a part of their science curriculum. Through a summer program with the SWCD, she provided students with the opportunity to learn more about water testing and healthy streams and facilitated the creation of a challenge course trail at Burkhart Creek Park through JR Wooden Middle Schools Day of Caring.

Christa Mathews is dedicated to our community, the



The Peine family has nearly 200 acres of their farm in a conservation easement amid their ongoing conservation efforts, earning them an Indiana River Friendly Farmer award. (SWCD courtesy photo)



Greene Crop Consulting, Inc., a crop consulting firm in Franklin, is honored with the Friends of Conservation Award for its efforts to help reduce sediment in Morgan and Owen counties’ waterways. (SWCD courtesy photo)

environment, and the students that she cares for!

Conservationist of the Year

Josh Griffin has worked in the field of conservation for over 30 years. Josh not only enjoys his job and creating habitat, but he shares that passion with those locally, too.

He and his wife personally manage approximately 42 acres of property as a wetland, a mature oak and hickory forest, and some as an early successional habitat. He

has assisted his neighbors in improving around 300 to 400 acres of land in his personal time. He has encouraged them to plant pollinator, native grasslands, and wetland habitats. He has also assisted them with timber stand improvements and prescribed burns to manage habitat.

He is dedicated to conservation across the state and right here in Morgan County.

Friends of Conservation

Greene Crop Consulting, Inc. is an independent crop consulting firm in Franklin. In 2020, they partnered with the Owen and Morgan County SWCD on a Clean Water Indiana Grant. The grant provided support for farmers wishing to transition into conservation farming practices to achieve success.

For three years, Greene Crop Consulting, Inc. provided amazing customer service, soil testing, field scouting, expert advice, and conservation-based recommendations to the participants in the program. They put together detailed reports, researched what to do with specific concerns, assisted with field days, and relayed good data to the participating farmers and to the SWCD for the purpose of grant reporting.

Their partnership resulted in a reduction of 6,995 tons of sediment in Morgan and Owen County waterways. That is almost 70 train cars of sediment!



John R. Wooden Middle School science teacher Christa Mathews (left) is honored by SWCD's Lisa MacPhee with the Environmental Educator of the Year award. (SWCD courtesy photo)



Josh Griffin (left) is honored as the Conservationist of the Year by SWCD's Doug Peine at the awards banquet recently. (SWCD courtesy photo)



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