

Hidden Valley High School teaches students to be good farmers

BY DIANA COOGLE

If FFA (Future Farmers of America) at Hidden Valley High School is any indication, the future farmers of the Applegate will be community leaders, good citizens, good stewards of husbandry and agriculture, and all-around good farmers. FFA teaches young people these important concepts along with farming skills. Besides, it's fun to be in FFA.

By the rules of the organization, a student has to be in an agriculture class to be a member. At Hidden Valley, that would be Dan Speelman's class. After learning about agriculture and husbandry, the students have a chance to use those skills in FFA competitions. They learn about the animals they raise for county fair competition. They learn how to judge livestock. In the fall, they learn about soil, then compete in a soil judging contest. In winter they learn parliamentary procedures and compete in

public speaking and in extemporaneous public speaking, in which they draw a topic and have half an hour to develop a speech and deliver it. In spring they study floriculture, memorizing lists of plants, taking cuttings, and identifying insect and other plant problems. They also participate in a meat judging contest, identifying which species the meat comes from, what cut it is, the name of the retail cut, and so forth.

One of Dan's assignments is for students to make up an agriculture-related business, research it, and do a presentation for a competition called "agricultural sales." Business ideas range from boarding horses to a catalog business for selling grooming supplies, from carriage rides for weddings and other events to fruit stands and restaurants.

Dan is only the second FFA sponsor

and agriculture teacher at Hidden Valley. Lowell Bickle started the class, and FFA along with it, in 1977, the year the school opened. He continued teaching till 2003, when he retired and Dan took over.

Every few years FFA students at Hidden Valley go east to the national FFA convention, which has been in Kentucky for the last few years and will be moving to Indianapolis next year. Dan doesn't take "just anyone" but chooses the kids who have been actively participating in the club during the year. The club has a fundraiser at the tractor show every Father's Day and a tri-tip dinner at the school, with a silent auction, to raise money to cover transportation and boarding costs for students on the trip.

If FFA's intent is to guide students towards successful



Hidden Valley High School FFA students, from left to right: Jessie Hendrickson, Chandra Green, Hunter Liska, Falynn Garrison, and Jon Vaughn. Photo: Dan Speelman.

agricultural businesses and good citizenship, Anna and Nathan Combe are good examples of the success of the organization at Hidden Valley. They were both a part of the high school's FFA program, and Anna served as its president. Now they have their own farming and haying business in Williams, where they raise cattle and sell hay and are, as Dan says, "outstanding people." Diana Coogle • dicoog@gmail.com

HORSE BUSINESS

Although dressage is a competitive sport, Kathy doesn't make money by winning at shows—not because she doesn't compete or because she doesn't win but because dressage has no purse for the winner. The value in competing is in the business it engenders.

"If you want to get into the horse business as a trainer and teacher," Kathy says, "go to horse shows and make a name for yourself. Winning competitions proves your competence."

By those lights, it's no wonder Kathy's business is so successful. On her horse, Florida, she has won ribbons at the international level of Prix St. George and in many other competitions. Every prize she or one of her students wins is another push forward in her business.

The lack of local competitions is a drawback for Applegate businesses that focus on show horses, since riders must frequently travel long distances to shows. Quarter horse riders have a well-known annual competition in Medford, but there is nothing for dressage or



The former Creekside Farms in Applegate, where owners Robert and Bev Hoogendyk offered boarding, horse training, and horse-riding lessons.

the endurance rider. When young Western riders enter Brushriders' popular gymkhana in Williams, they work hard for prestige and pride, not for money.

Buying and selling horses could be the best money-maker in the horse business, but Kathy is shocked at the idea of selling Florida. "Never!" she exclaims.

Because horse trading is so important, Applegate vets do good business breeding horses. Veterinarian Tom Everman has done as many as 50

breeds a year for racehorses at the home of Flying Lark. Another profitable aspect of the veterinarian business is the pre-purchase exam.

A good vet is in high demand here. When Tom moved to the Applegate, he barely had time to get settled before his business, South Side Equine, filled his time.

A good farrier is also in high demand. Brent Bare, a local farrier, shoes all kinds of horses—dressage,

barrel, trail, gaited—everything, he says, "from very expensive dressage horses to \$100 pets." Business is good, even though, as Brent sees it, the popularity of horseback riding is declining. "At the county fairs the horse arenas have a small fraction of the kids who used to be there," he says, "and the equestrian teams are dwindling." Part of the reason seems to be the expense, another part the desire, but "those of us not smart enough to know better still have our horses," Brent says.

Horse owners put up with the expense because they love their horses. "It's about a lifestyle," says Nancy Adams, trail rider. "I'm 67 years old and chomping to go for a gallop. There are trails to be ridden, creeks to be smelled, skylines to be viewed, leaves to be seen"—competitions to enter, gymkhanas to ride in, racehorses to buy and sell—everything that makes having a horse so much fun for the owner and so profitable for the businesses.

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