

MARICOPA COUNTY FAIR EXHIBITOR OUTREACH PROJECT SUCCESS

BY ANNA AJA, ACGA DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

While growing up, many of you and your children were blessed with the opportunity to show livestock in 4-H and FFA. That opportunity was afforded to you because your parents, family or friends helped you get started with the funding, animal, supplies or space. Not every child has this opportunity but many have the desire to do a beef project. Maricopa County Fair (MCF) bravely took the lead in helping two students in their inaugural launch of the Maricopa County Fair Exhibitor Outreach Project for Beef.

I visited with MCF Executive Director, Karen Searle, and immediate past president of the board, Tim Cooley, about the program. Karen's husband Mike, also the Executive Director, originally came up with the idea. "We've seen how expensive it is to get into showing cattle. We wanted to help the kids that have an interest but can't afford it," explained Karen. It was a board decision and monies were allotted for the scholarships. Essentially, students applied for the project and the two selected were awarded the steers and the tools they would need to be successful. MCF not only procured the steers but also provided the exhibitors with the "whole kit and caboodle" - halters, clippers, blocking chutes, feed buckets, blowers, feed and more. Upon sale of the steers the students then pay back the cost of the steers and feed and can either purchase or return any or all of the equipment. Chitwood Feed in Maricopa provided the feed at wholesale to the board and Bales Hay Sales in Buckeye donated the hay. Other generous donors included Brianna Larios, Brawley, who housed and fed the steers from March-July and Mark Rovey, Glendale, did the same for July-September 2012 when the students received them. Tim Cooley the legwork in finding the calves and setting up logistics along with even hauling the students to other livestock shows.

The ultimate goal of MCF was to set up the students for success. They wanted to give them an opportunity to purchase the supplies for future projects if they wanted, or to return them at no cost. The board also wanted the students to have a successful project financially so they could afford another project next year, if they wanted. The program took into consideration the possibility of the steers not making the sale or not selling for enough money to cover the costs. Arrangements were made so the students wouldn't be stuck paying off MCF for the next year.

The six applicants went through an interview process and Leah Edwards, a senior of Buckeye Union High School, and Madeline Fraker, a junior of AAEC-Paradise Valley, won. They were given mentors to help them with their projects: Katy & Kelly Wright of Buckeye mentored Leah and Manfred Rojas and daughters Chelsey and Shelby helped Madeline. Leah had previously shown dairy cattle and would not have had the opportunity to show a beef steer without the financial assistance. She enjoyed learning about the beef industry and a new aspect to showing livestock. She plans to save her profit to use toward nursing school. Edwards was very grateful for the help of her mentors, other exhibitors and

her Ag teacher who drove her to the monthly MCF board meetings.

Madeline had previously shown pygmy goats and market lambs. She had always wanted cows and for three years in a row asked her mom if she could have one but her mom said no. After being chosen she set out to find a place to keep her steer since she lives in town. Using Google Maps she looked at all the possibilities of neighbors in a two mile radius and sent out 30

letters – she got back four responses. She rents property from a neighbor and pays for electricity and water and is rebuilding some fence in exchange for a boarding fee. Fraker is already



L-R: Madeline Fraker with "Bubba" and Leah Edwards with "Leo."

planning her next year's project and has secured a job at a local feed store to help finance her next steer. She is the only person in her family involved in agriculture and after high school plans to attend New Mexico State University and get Animal Science and Ag Business degrees. When speaking about the outreach program, Fraker enthusiastically shared, "It's been a dream for me. I honestly feel like a celebrity because people come up to me and say congratulations."

Both practiced with their steers at other shows like the Arizona National Livestock Show, Arizona State Fair, Buckeye Ag Day and Millenium Show Day. Madeline's advice to others is, "Even if you have the smallest inkling to do it – apply!" Leah has more practical advice for exhibitors, "Don't let go of your halter!"

Manfred Rojas stated, "It's a very good program to help kids develop skills and enhance their abilities. The kids grow their responsibility and the parents get more involved and the family nucleus grows."

"This program really, truly brought us as a board, staff and management together and constantly reminded us why we are here," shared Karen.

If you are interested in starting a similar program in your county and want more information contact Mike or Karen Searle: 602-568-2105 or Michael@maricopacountyfair.org or Karen@maricopacountyfair.org.