

Yesterday's 4-Hers, today's leaders



State 4-H award winners (from left) Daniel Kelley, Philip Nelson, Richard Knipe, and Craig Bidner were recognized for their dedication to Illinois 4-H at the ACES College Connection in September.

The Illinois 4-H Foundation recognized the exceptional contributions of four former 4-H members at the ACES College Connection, held September 6 in Champaign.

The **Illinois 4-H Alumni Award** recognizes an elite group of individuals for their outstanding career accomplishments and leadership in civic, community, and professional activities.

Craig Bidner was a 10-year member of the Danvers Industrial Youth and the Rugged Rambler 4-H Clubs in McLean County. Today he is the owner and CEO of Nikco Sports in Chesterfield, Missouri. In 2009, Craig and his wife, Joy, began the Gateway Gang 4-H Club in St. Louis as a way for their two children and other youth to benefit from the 4-H experience. They continue to be the club's leaders today. "4-H was a learning opportunity and a foundation that our family built on to succeed in life," Bidner said.

Daniel Kelley was a 10-year member of the Linden Lead 'Em 4-H Club, also in McLean County. Today Kelley is a grain farmer near Normal and recently served as the president of the GROWMARK, Inc., board of directors, from 1995 to 2013. Kelley said he clearly remembers the inspiration and insight of his 4-H leader, Clarence Ropp. Upon Ropp's retirement, Kelley volunteered as an assistant leader to help Ray Ropp with the club. Twenty-three years

later, Kelley stepped down. Kelley expressed his pride in being a part of the 86-year-old Linden Lead 'Em 4-H Club's legacy.

Philip Nelson was a 10-year member of the Miller Township 4-H Club in LaSalle County. Nelson is a fourth-generation owner and operator of the grain and livestock farm where he grew up. His early 4-H experiences provided him with valuable leadership skills and laid the foundation for his life of service to the agriculture industry. He served as vice president of the Illinois Farm Bureau from 1999 to 2003 and as president from 2003 to 2013. Nelson has used his leadership roles within the organization to serve as a tireless advocate for 4-H.

The **Friend of 4-H Award** is an annual recognition of a person or organization whose leadership, actions, and support have contributed to the involvement and promotion of statewide Illinois 4-H Youth Development programs.

Richard Knipe, a retired beef animal systems specialist with University of Illinois Extension, received the 2014 Friend of 4-H Award. Knipe spent eight years as coordinator of the Illinois 4-H Livestock Judging Program and coach of the state 4-H judging team building a volunteer coaching system that drives the development of some 2,000 Illinois youth annually. When ethical behavior in 4-H livestock shows became an issue in the late 1990s, Knipe helped to develop a series of 4-H and FFA quality assurance and ethics clinics. Richard is the co-founder of Riverside Research's MarketMaker.