Cole Camp's Leslie Neas makes service a priority

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SEDALIA DEMOCRAT

Leslie Neas' personality is as big as her heart.

The 12-year-old Cole Camp sixth grader recently took home third place in the Boys and Girls Clubs of West Central Missouri's Youth of the Year event. Leslie said she enjoys attending the after-school club and enjoyed participating in photography last spring.

She also enjoys spending time with her friends that attend the club with her and volunteering for club-sponsored community service projects.

Last Father's Day, Leslie combined her love of photography and helping people by spearheading an event at Parkview Christian Church. Leslie said her congregation always celebrates the mothers of the church with a mother/daughter banquet, but the fathers weren't officially celebrated. So, Leslie took her pink Kodak camera to church and began snapping pictures of the fathers and grandfathers with their children and grandchildren.

With the help of her father, Leslie compiled a slide show of the pictures which she showed at a Father's Day service. She sang "Daddy's Hands" as the pictures scrolled across the screen.

"I was so nervous about singing," she said.

Leslie's mother, Yvette Neas, said her daughter has an eye for photography.

"She takes really good pictures," Yvette said.

One of Leslie's favorite pictures is of her friend, Nick, taken on an arched bridge.

"I think I'm going to print the picture in color," Leslie said, "because I like the way the sun is on his face."

Leslie hopes to enter the photograph in the Missouri State Fair.

The outgoing preteen also is active in her local 4-H club and is the youngest member to be chosen to serve on the 4-H County Council. She serves as historian for the council and as photographer for her local club.

Leslie joined 4-H at the age of 5 and is currently learning ceramics and ham curing through the organization.

"I sold my last ham for $200 at a premium sale," she said.

In 2009, Leslie completed 114 volunteer hours. Many of those hours were spent raising funds for the 7 Bells Sanctuary, an animal sanctuary in Cole Camp. During Mayfest, Leslie took part in a "rock-a-thon" where she and other 4-H club members sat in rocking chairs along Main Street to raise money. Yvette said the "I sold my last ham for $200 at a premium sale," she said.

In 2009, Leslie completed 114 volunteer hours. Many of those hours were spent raising funds for the 7 Bells Sanctuary, an animal sanctuary in Cole Camp. During Mayfest, Leslie took part in a "rock-a-thon" where she and other 4-H club members sat in rocking chairs along Main Street to raise money. Yvette said the
group made enough money to buy two large bags of dog food during the fundraiser. Leslie also helped stitch dog pillows and make homemade dog treats for the sanctuary.

"Leslie is service-minded and she wants to make the world a better place," Yvette said.

Other volunteer hours were spent at the Show-Me Christian Youth Home where she worked in the food pantry and spent a day hauling trash to trash bins.

"She got covered in trash," Yvette said, "but she didn't care."

Leslie describes herself as a "casual" girl who doesn't feel like she has to follow the crowd. She enjoys outdoor activities and looks forward to winter so she can sled with her brother and sister. She sings in her school choir and plays soccer and basketball.

"She is very athletic," Yvette said. "She definitely got the athletic gene."

Leslie plans to attend State Fair Community College for two years before transferring to the School of the Ozarks in Branson. She plans to attain degrees in both music and child development, so she can pursue her dream career as a house parent at the Show-Me Christian Youth Home.

"I'm friends with a lot of the kids there," she said, "and I want to help them."

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