

Faith In The Future

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Like me, I'm sure you've all heard on a regular basis that our country is going to heck in a handcart and the next generation, whomever that is, will ruin our country. While there are times that I see actions that would make me agree with this, I've also had numerous occasions to have a great deal of faith in our future. One of those occasions occurred recently when I got to spend four days at 4-H Camp with several hundred 2nd through 7th graders and about 65 very awesome high school age counselors.

4-H Camp is a pretty typical summer camp setting. There's crafts and swimming, fishing and canoeing, campfires and archery and lots of other activities. In our camp a cabin group is comprised of no more than eight campers plus two counselors. The counselors are high school age young men and women. Then there's all of us county agents and adult volunteers from each county that's involved in the camp group.

The counselors arrive early for camp to participate in two days of training. Many of the counselors return from year to year. On the afternoon of the second day of training the campers arrive and will spend the next 72 hours with the counselors enjoying their camp activities. These counselors get to spend time over that period helping their campers to get to know each other and function as a unit. Each camp group will go swimming at the same time and decide which extra activities they will do and when. Whatever they decide to do, they will do it as a group.

If you think about it, there are many ways that these camp groups are microcosms of society. Democratic process is utilized where the majority rules. Sometimes compromises are reached that won't make everyone happy. The counselors become diplomats and negotiators as they help the eight little boys or girls decide how they are going to spend their camp time.

These campers also get to deal with all the emotions and challenges over that period. There will be homesickness, there will be hurt feelings, and there will even be the occasional bump, bruise, scrape or bug bite. These are all things that little boys and girls deal with every day. If a counselor has a question about how to deal with a specific situation, an adult is always close by for support and counsel. While the counselors know that the adults are there for backup, they also try to deal with as much as they can within the camp group.

I've watched campers grow from second grade through seventh grade and then come back a few years later as a counselor. I've seen energetic (read borderline wild) little boys and girls, grow up, calm down and come back as some of the best counselors you could ever ask for. I've watched teenage boys turn into mother hens with their brood around them at all times. I've watched these young men and women guide first time campers through the woes of homesickness only to watch with pride as Mom and Dad come to take the campers home at the end of camp knowing that those campers have grown up in those few days. I've even watched some of those campers become counselors and then come back as county extension agents themselves.

So when someone asks me if I'm worried about the next generation, I tell them no, I'm not. I have faith in the future because I've seen these boys and girls grow into caring and compassionate young men and women who will be the leaders of tomorrow in our state and our country.