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Hardin County gains a new 4-H Youth Development Agent

By BECCA OWSLEY THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE

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Sue Ann McCandless is joining the Hardin County Cooperative Extension Services as a 4-H Youth Development Agent.

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Hardin County Cooperative Extension Services has gained a new 4-H Youth Development Agent.

Sue Ann McCandless, 42, will begin Monday as a 4-H agent after serving as a staff assistant at the extension service in LaRue County for 17 years.

She's worked with extension service programs in her previous position but is looking forward to being able to implement her own ideas into a program and to get in there and be hands-on from start to finish.

"I think it is good to challenge yourself from time to time," she said. "Stepping into an agent role, especially in Hardin County, will really allow me to do just that."

McCandless was involved in 4-H growing up and it gave her opportunities to experience new things. She said it can open doors for youth and help them develop different skills.

"I have seen kids come into the program with various deficits and the leadership and communication skills that they developed through various activities have really helped them grow," she said. "The biggest thing is that 4-H really does have something for everyone."

With 4-H, she said the variety of programs offer something for most every interest a youth may have.

Traditions, she said, are important and she wants to be able to keep the foundation of the program in Hardin County intact. But, she said, there's always room to grow.

"I want to be able to take some time to do some observations and figure out the best way to do that," she said. "The last couple of years have taught us that we need to be very fluid in how we offer programming so that we are consistently meeting the needs of our youth."

The world is constantly changing and she said she'll keep that in mind and find a way to mix in some new ideas with the traditional values of the program.

Her move to the Hardin County office stemmed from furthering her education to teach her sons, Brayden and Nolan, they can accomplish their goals.

By working in the University of Kentucky extension program, she was able to take six hours of classes per semester at no cost.

“I decided to try to lead by example and enrolled at Western Kentucky University to work towards my Bachelor’s,” she said. “I thought if I could show them mom can do it, then they’d see that they could do it, too.”

Being a single mom, working full-time and going to school wasn’t always easy, but she did it and graduated Summa Cum Laude in May. She hopes her sons learned from her experience.

“The struggle is real as they say, but you can do it,” she said, adding you just have to take the chance.

She took that chance to come to Hardin County and feels like that step is where God wants her to be.

She is stepping into the shoes of 4-H Youth Development Agent Bonnie Jolly who served for 25 years and retired in 2020.

McCandless said she worked with Jolly a few times with the Country Ham Project.

“I would say Bonnie is something of a legend and in no way do I ever think I’d come close to filling her shoes,” she said. “I can only hope that I can manage the foundation she has laid in a way that will make her proud.”

A welcome reception for McCandless is scheduled from 4 to 6 p.m. Tuesday at the Hardin County Cooperate Extension Service office.

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