

Horses, 4-H involvement bring Boeve family together

Gentle animals helped Steen girl to heal after losing her mother in 2014 when she was 4 years old

By Mavis Fodness

Horses have shaped 14-year-old Claire Boeve into who she is today, and 4-H assisted in the journey.

The Blue Ribbon 4-H Club member is among the 117 Rock County 4-H'ers who will exhibit animals at the Rock County Fair July 24-27 in Luverne.

Claire, an incoming freshman at Hills-Beaver Creek High School, has chosen the horse project as her focus.

"I have had an interest in horses as early as I can remember," she admitted.

Her first exposure to the large animals came early as Claire spent time and often rode double with her aunt, Amanda Roth, a horse owner herself.

Claire was smitten with the gentle animals, which allowed her to channel her feelings and move forward with a pointed passion after the loss of her mother, Andrea, in 2014, when she was 4 years old.

As Claire's interest grew to owning her own horse, it took seven years to convince her dad, Matt, and stepmom, Kayla, to agree.

Exposure to the horses at Rock Ranch near Hills helped make the decision easier.

"I had no idea how big of personalities they had and how you can just feel better working with them," Kayla said.

"We finally agreed to just one, which led to two and now three, because we realized how much our whole family enjoys them."

In 2021 Eddie, a



Mavis Fodness photo/0718 Fair Preview 2024 4-H Boeve

The Rock County Fair, July 24-27, will be a busy one for the Boeve family of Steen as Claire (far left) exhibits her horse, Calvin, at the event. The horse project provides a reference to horse care and riding for stepmom, Kayla (center, holding Violet), and dad, Matt (holding Eddie). Neither Kayla nor Matt grew up with horses, but 4-H helps them and Claire explore her passion for the animals.

palomino gelding and retired lesson horse from Rock Ranch, came to the Boeve cattle farm north of Steen.

Eddie was followed a year later by a seasoned show horse, Calvin, and last year a more spirited horse, Violet, joined the herd.

Because of their different personalities, the horses have become the favorite topics of Claire's sister, Mallorie, 11, and stepbrothers, EJ Wegener, 16, and Gracyn Wegener, 13.

"Even the boys, who don't ride much, talk about them quite often and what they did as they drive past the pasture," Kayla said.

As youth, however, Matt and Kayla had limited experience with horses.



Claire Boeve poses with her horse, Calvin. The pair will seek a grand champion ribbon at the 2024 Rock County Fair.

"I had no idea how big of personalities they had and how you can just feel better working with them."

— Kayla Boeve, Claire's stepmom

"My grandpa would ride bareback from time to time, but I always chose the three-wheeler instead," Matt said.

"My grandpa had his horses trained so well, we just needed to sit on them and they knew what to do," said Kayla.

To assist in their learning, the Boeve family joined Rock County 4-H.

Participating in the horse project since 2020, they became a part of a community who eagerly offered suggestions and support when issues

arose.

They were pointed to the horse project as Claire's interest grew beyond just riding in the pasture to wanting to exhibit at local horse shows.

During the 2021 Rock County Fair, the Boeve youth focused on static projects, with Claire taking up photography, but more time became devoted to the horses and Calvin in 2022.

During the summer, Claire participated in the Wednesday night 4-H

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riding sessions.

"Horses are my sport, and 4-H gave me a place to show them," Claire said. "I also show outside of 4-H, but the fair is kind of one of my bigger shows."

The 2022 Rock County Fair was Claire and Calvin's first time at the fair.

"I was nervous because the week leading up to the fair Calvin was lame with an abscess," she said.

Due to the hoof ailment, Claire limited her riding time to a couple of classes.

A year later, a healthy Calvin was easily exhibited by an excited Claire in all the riding classes, setting the goal for this year's fair.

"I am hoping for a grand (champion ribbon) in pleasure and also hope to qualify for the state 4-H horse show," she said.

Regardless of the outcome at the fair, horses have changed the Boeve family.

For Claire, horses have become a year-round activity and responsibility.

"She not only rides several times a week, but she is out there taking care of them in the rain, cold, sunshine and 50-below with snow, and yet she never complains," Kayla said.

With the addition of Violet, a game horse, Claire is branching out to participate in events



Submitted photo



Mavis Fodness photo/0718 Fair Preview 2024 4-H Boeve

Claire Boeve enjoys a ride with her aunt Amanda Roth at age 5 when her passion for horses and horseback riding began to develop. Pictured above at right, she competes in the grades 6-9 western pleasure class at the 2022 Rock County Fair. Below, she's pictured at age 5.

*"We have lots of fun riding.
We have the best conversations
on the back of horses,
riding through the fields and having
lots of good laughs when
I end up falling off somehow."*

— Kayla Boeve

outside of equitation events in which she rides Calvin.

"Riding games (barrels, poles, etc.) is different because you ride way faster compared to pleasure," Claire said. "In pleasure your goal is

to ride slow."

As a show of support, Matt and Kayla attend the 4-H riding sessions and assist Claire at the open shows by providing an extra hand in preparation for the ring. At home, the elder



Boeves occasionally join Claire in the saddle. Matt rides Eddie on occasional trail rides, and Kayla is taking riding lessons at

Rock Ranch to improve her experience with Claire.

"We have lots of fun riding," Kayla said. "We

have the best conversations on the back of horses, riding through the fields and having lots of good laughs when I end up falling off somehow."

Claire is one of 15 horse exhibitors registered to appear at the 2024 Rock County Fair.

The horse show takes place Friday, July 26.

Claire joins 117 other youth who have indicated they will bring one or more animals to the four-day fair.

In static projects, local 4-H'ers are expected to bring as many as 800 exhibits to the fair.




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