

IFAS Extension
Florida 4-H Youth Development Program

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Melanie Baggs Named 2008 4-H Salute to Excellence National Volunteer of the Year

(DELONA, FL.)— Florida 4-H Youth Development is proud to recognize Melanie Baggs of Delona, FL, for her impact on youth across Florida. Baggs was named as the 2008 National Volunteer of the Year by the 2008 4-H Salute to Excellence Award Selection Committee, due to her exceptional contributions as a volunteer with the Volusia County 4-H program.

Throughout her eight years with 4-H, Baggs constantly encouraged volunteerism and community service within her 4-H clubs, leading various 4-H projects focusing on horticulture, cooking, game boards, talent shows, and leadership development. One of her projects, in which she organized 4-H youth to bring small animals to community retirement homes to share with residents, earned her respect among young 4-H'ers, who enjoyed interacting and sharing their knowledge of animals with the residents.

“Melanie knew how to balance work and fun, and to make sure that the ‘boring, educational stuff’ was actually exciting,” said Laura Cash, 4-H Extension Agent, Volusia County, Florida. “She is a valuable resource within Extension and his well respected by other 4-H volunteers.”

Baggs served as a significant adult mentor for many 4-H members. On many occasions she invited youth to her house to keep them company until their parents got home from work. She credits 4-H with keeping her out of trouble as a youth, and uses 4-H programs and activities to help today’s youth make smart choices and build goals for a positive future.

“Melanie understands the value of life skills education and the importance of being physically and emotionally safe. She is an advocate and voice for all youth—I cannot imagine 4-H without her,” said Cash.

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Baggs was recognized as the 2008 Salute to Excellence Volunteer of the Year at the 4-H Hall of Fame event on October 10, 2008, at National 4-H Center in Chevy Chase, MD.

Gene and Sharon Swackhamer established the National 4-H Salute to Excellence Volunteer Recognition Fund to emphasize the important work of 4-H volunteers across America. The awards, made possible through the fund and Monsanto Company, the premier corporate sponsor, recognize 4-H volunteers who demonstrate exemplary service to 4-H while promoting service through volunteerism as both an opportunity and a privilege. Volunteers are awarded in two categories: Lifetime Volunteer, for more than 10 years of service to 4-H, and Volunteer of the Year, for less than 10 years of service. For information on how to nominate a 4-H volunteer for an award in 2009, contact Pat Smith at psmith@fourhcouncil.edu or 301-961-2819.

Monsanto Company is a leading global provider of technology-based solutions and agricultural products that improve farm productivity and food quality. For additional information, please visit www.monsanto.com.

4-H is a community of six million young people across America learning leadership, citizenship and life skills. 4-H youth engage in hands-on learning experiences with support from 540,000 volunteers across the country. National 4-H Council is the national, private sector, non-profit partner of the 4-H Youth Development Program and its parent, the Cooperative Extension System of the United States Department of Agriculture. Learn more about 4-H at www.4-H.org.

Founded in 1909, Florida 4-H Youth Development Program works with more than 234,000 youth ages 5-18 and is active in all 67 counties, and with the Seminole Tribe of Florida. Florida 4-H is the youth development program of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service (CES), headquartered in Gainesville within UF's IFAS. The CES is funded by a partnership between federal, state and county government agencies. For more information about Florida 4-H, visit www.florida4h.org or contact your county Extension office. All programs are open to all persons regardless of race, color, age, sex, handicap or national origin.

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