



SCHOOL NEWS

HAPPENINGS FROM OUR CLAY COUNTY SCHOOLS

APRIL 2024

Cooper Hickey not afraid to get hands dirty at the Fair

By Don Coble
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LAKE ASBURY – Put an obstacle course in front of Cooper Hickey, hand the seventh-grader from Lake Asbury Junior High a set of keys to a tractor and ask him to navigate through it, and he won't flinch.

He's never more at home when he's in the middle of a barnyard or a field, no matter the challenge.

And while he's stepping a little out of his comfort zone in June to compete in the FFA Middle School Extemporaneous Public Speaking Contest and the Florida State Convention and Leadership Conference, he knows he can rely on his passion for forestry, cattle operations and farming to make a good impression on the judges.

"It will be a random subject, something we draw from a hat," Cooper said. "After that, we have 10 minutes to write a three-to-five-minute speech. Sometimes, you have to wing it as you go."

Cooper has a binder with a lot of USDA facts and plenty of Florida Farm Bureau cattlemen magazines and records. But more than anything else, he has experience working in the woods, fields and barns. He has enough firsthand information, he knows he can give the judges everything they want to know.

Cooper has been a fixture at the Clay County Agriculture Fair since he was 8 when he was showing market swine. He's worked in the Padgett House in the Early Florida Village, the Unlimited Opportunities Goat Show for children with special needs and Ag Town. Last year, he won first place in the Tractor Driving Competition at

SEE COOPER



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Tyler Brock's Poultry Pals to take flight at Clay Fair

Special needs contestants to showcase their chickens on April 11

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Tyler Brock felt an emptiness last year when he said goodbye to some Unlimited Opportunities Goat Show contestants.

The experience was rewarding. As a buddy, he worked with individuals with special needs, who showcased their goats and answered questions about their animals and experiences.

Contestants were overwhelmed with joy and confidence; buddies felt a quiet accomplishment.

"They do this amazing show at the county fair with the unlimited goats, but it's for individuals in kindergarten through 12th grade," Brock said. "Once they graduate, they don't have that opportunity anymore. I came to realize they don't have

a lot of opportunities for adults with special needs. So I figured I needed to create another opportunity that's not goats. This one's called Poultry Pals, and they'll actually be showing that chicken inside the Fair."

Many of this year's Poultry Pals competition were in last year's Unlimited Opportunities Goat Show, including Tyler's Poultry Pal, Patrick.

Participants in Poultry Pals are high school graduates or currently in a transition program at a post-high school. They will be paired with a 2024 4-H or FFA member who has experience showing animals at a competitive level and will be considered a Buddy.

The Buddy and the Adult Exhibitor will work together to walk a silkie chicken into the show ring for judging. The adult Exhibitor and their Buddy will work together so everyone is comfortable with the judging process.

Through this competition, Exhibitors will also learn chicken facts to answer questions posed by a judge.

The pageantry involving the adults and their silkie chickens will start at 5 p.m. on Thursday, April 11, at the



XXXXX

J.P. Hall Livestock Arena.

Officially, Tyler's mother, Dana, is the superintendent of the program because her son is an eighth grader at Lake Asbury Junior High, but she said the title is merely symbolic. Tyler is responsible for creating the project.

"I'm just along for the ride and to support him," she said.

Silkie chickens are flightless and are without spurs. Contestants were required to attend two practice sessions, and they seemed enamored by their chirpy little friends.

Brock is the President of the Future

Farmers of America at Lake Asbury.

"Actually, I started FFA because of chickens," he said. "I had four chickens even though we were in a place where we shouldn't have chickens. We still had the chickens, and that started me out. I came closer to animals and students with special needs through chickens."

Brock hopes Poultry Pals becomes the springboard for other projects.

"So there'll be adults that are twice as old as buddies, but that's still OK because we still want all these adults to have a continuous opportunity," Brock said. "Everyone deserves the same opportunity."

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- ★ Ranked #1 county with best public schools in Florida by Niche in 2023.
- ★ CCDS offers 34+ Career and Technical Education programs.
- ★ All junior high and senior high schools have accelerated learning programs.
- ★ Seven CCDS schools are recognized as a Purple Star School of Distinction by the Florida Department of Education.
- ★ Enhanced and increased security measures to keep students and staff safe.
- ★ Secured over \$1.2 million in grant funds for fine arts programs across all schools.
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Fleming Island High

#OneClay

12 earn 'Schools of Excellence' designations by state

For School News

CLAY COUNTY – The Florida Department of Education notified the Clay County District Schools that for the second consecutive year, 12 of its schools had earned the designation as a School of Excellence.

Discovery Oaks, Fleming Island, Keystone Heights, Lakeside, Orange Park, Robert M. Paterson, Lake Asbury, Thunderbolt and Shadowlawn elementary schools, Fleming Island High and Lakeside and Green Cove Springs junior highs all returned after earning spots for the 2022-23 school year.

"You know, it's an interesting time in public education," Superintendent David Broskie said. "I would just express how proud I am of all of our schools in Clay County. For schools to achieve schools of excellence is even that much more special for those schools."

The state requires to designate a school as a School of Excellence, the school's percentage of possible points earned in

its school grade calculation is in the 80th percentile or higher for schools comprised of the same grade groupings (elementary, middle, high and combination) for at least two of the last three school years. Schools that initially qualify for the designation retain their designation as a School of Excellence for up to three years, at the end of which they may renew the designation.

"It's been a good year, a good year indeed," Broskie said. "It really has been an exciting year, and we're looking forward to the future. We're going to focus on early literacy, focus on CTE programs and providing educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their ability level and interest. Which, I said in the State of the Schools, is very difficult. Everybody has a different interest, and you have 42,000 (student) different interests. It's kind of hard to consolidate it into a program, but I think we do a pretty good job of providing opportunities for all students in Clay County."



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Cooper

the Fair. He was the first Grand Champion Intermediate Ag Mechanics Project for the fire pit he welded at the Florida State Fair in Tampa and the first Grand Champion Intermediate Ag Mechanics for Showmanship. This year, he was selected by the Fair's Board of Directors as one of five Volunteers of the Year.

At Lake Asbury, he's a member of the AgVentures 4-H Club and the Vice President of the FFA Chapter.

"I'm fourth generation," Cooper said. "My family's always been around cattle, forestry, swine. As I got older, I got to see things from a different perspective. It's

very important for many people in this county that agriculture is the theme for this Fair."

Cooper said no matter how fast Clay County grows, he said it's up to his generation – and those that follow – to make sure the county never gets lost in the five o'clock rush. It needs to take time to till the land and plant beans, smell the fresh-cut hay, move cattle to another field and even wince when it's downwind of the pig pen.

"What makes Clay County special is that we have all our original stuff (at Early Florida Village)," he said. "It's cool to show people our heritage, especially since Clay County is growing so fast – one of the fastest-growing counties in Florida. Agri-business is a way of life for a lot of us here."



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