

MEET THE COURT



Photo by Shara Giordano, The Sweet Life Photography

From left to right: Laiklyn Fields-Nichols, Bobbie Sharp, Rebekah Miller, Olivia Warner.

Princesses immersed in fair culture

When a girl is selected for the fair court, Alice Newman is the first person to tell her. When she called Olivia Warner, one of the girls on this year's court, she said, "I just want to be the first person to call you princess."

"I get to be the one to tell them when they're on the court, because I love to do that," said Newman.

For many of the girls on this year's fair court, their involvement in the fair is extensive.

All of the girls are involved in 4-H or FFA and have been showing animals at the fair for years. Warner has been showing animals for four years, Laiklyn Fields-Nichols has been showing for eight years, and as for Bobbie Sharp and Rebekah Miller — Newman says they grew up here.

And although they've been

involved for many years, being part of the fair court is, without a doubt, a learning opportunity.

Newman says for her first meeting with the girls in December she tells them: "Yeah, you all think you know your fair things, let's see how well." Then she proceeds to quiz them with a list of questions about the fair, such as when was the first fair and where was it held? What is daily admittance to the fair? And I want to show a sheep, but I'm not part of 4-H or FFA. Can I do it?

(Answer: Yes. It's called jackpot lamb.)

And although they generally don't do well on the first quiz, they improve over time.

"Give them a month and they can answer every single one of them," said Newman.

For someone who has been involved in the community as

long as Newman has, it is not uncommon for her to chaperone or lead generations of women from the same family. She was the 4-H leader for both Sharp and Miller's moms, and has also chaperoned their sisters or cousins through previous fair courts.

Newman was a chaperone in the '90s before her own daughters and granddaughters participated in the court. Then she took a hiatus. She resumed chaperoning duties about five or six years ago. On top of that, she says she has the longest running livestock club in Umatilla County with the same leader — 38 years, to be exact.

She said her first meeting is with "timid little girls who don't want to do much," but by the end of their time on the fair court they have become young ladies that can take charge.

Many of the girls agree that the fair court has helped them find confidence. Fields-Nichols

says the thing she will take from the court is her improved communication skills.

And they've had a lot of practice with speaking in public. Starting in May, the fair court has about one to two speaking engagements per week. In June and July, it turns into about three or four.

"Most of the time when you see a fair court, all you see them doing is a parade. And you either see them throwing candy at you or waving on a horse or something. We are a working fair court, is what I like to call it," said Newman.

This means they are responsible for numerous activities such as working concession stands, helping set up for the fair and others — on top of the parades where they throw candy.

"These girls are on here to represent their county and their fair and so they want to give back," said Newman.