

Fair court exemplifies county's AG ROOTS

By **NICK ROSENBERGER**

EO Media Group

With COVID-19 shutting down the Umatilla County Fair in 2020, the young women on this year's Fair Court are more than ready to take their positions.

The four-person court is made up of Keeva Hoston, from Hermiston, and Brielle Youncs, Madaline White and Alexis Bowen, all from Pendleton.

All three Pendleton girls are heading into their senior year of high school, while Hoston graduated from Hermiston High School on June 3. She is planning to go into nursing and is thinking about attending Blue Mountain Community college for two years before transferring.

All four princesses are involved in FFA, a youth organization focused on agriculture and leadership.

Hoston, who was a dance team manager during her junior year, was part of the FFA team that were state champions this year and will be attending nationals for the organization. Her team will be focusing on vertical farming in large cities and will be going to California to visit some vertical farms before heading to Nashville for the competition this fall.

"What I'm most looking forward to is the kids, is the children being able to see us just because they get so excited and I love that for them," she said.

Bowen, who has lived in Pendleton her whole life and is a varsity swimmer for Pendleton High School, a National Honors Society member and the Pendleton FFA Chapter treasurer, grew up working on her grandparents' sheep farm. She has been showing animals at the county fair since she was 6 years old.



The Sweet Life Photography/Contributed Photo

The 2021 Umatilla County Fair princesses Brielle Youncs, left, Madaline White, Alexis Bowen and Keeva Hoston pose for a portrait.

"I just grew up wanting to be the princesses that I looked up to," Bowen said.

And while she has finally accomplished her dream of becoming a Umatilla County Fair princess, it isn't exactly how she imagined it would be with the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's just kind of different," she said. "It's not exactly what you expect but we're making the most out of it."

Despite the uncertainty, Bowen is hopeful they can make the fair even better since people missed so much last year and is looking forward to everyone coming together after such a

tumultuous year.

"Especially right now it seemed like everybody's fighting against each other," she said. "But when you see the community come together, even with their differences, it may fix problems that we've been all going through, or help each other through it."

Youncs, who participates in Young Life with her church and plays soccer, softball and basketball, got involved with the court through a friend who had been in FFA with her. Her favorite part of the fair is the livestock event and she loves attending and seeing everyone there — and especially

being a role model for young girls in the area.

"I definitely wanted to be a really big role model to our little girls," Youncs said. "Just so they can see all the things that you get to do when you are on court."

And, the fair is a special time as families are able to come together — like for Youncs.

"It's the one time my dad can get a week off work," she said. "It's the one time we get to spend together, and so I'm excited to be there with him."

Youncs also helped convince Princess Madaline White to apply for the court.

White, who moved to the area about 10 years ago, grew up with her grandpa's cattle ranch and has always been interested in agriculture. When she was finally able to show livestock, she figured out that she wanted to show sheep.

"When I was younger, we actually went to the fair and they had mutton busting," she said. "I ended up doing that and I don't know why, but I just fell in love with the sheep and I just stuck with it."

White, who already has developed her own small business for her livestock, wants to go to college for agriculture, raise competitive club lambs and work with some of the other bigger show and breeders in the country.

"I kind of have a little obsession with it," White said. "I've loved it ever since I started doing it."

"The fair is everything," she said. "It means a lot to the community because it's a good place to get together and you don't have to worry about any outside issues. It's kind of just like a fun time for everyone to enjoy."