

# Opening doors: Key Club continues service more than 50 years later

By ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Herald

The Hermiston High School Key Club's meeting Jan. 12 was bustling with activity. Members played games, enjoyed snacks and discussed their community work.

And they chatted about their club's past, including how Umatilla County Commissioner Dan Dorrn was a Key Club member in his youth and met none other than "The Greatest" himself, Muhammed Ali.

Hermiston's Kiwanis Club founded the Key Club more than 50 years ago. Then, as now, the club guided young people to develop as community-minded individuals. At the meeting, students expressed their thoughts about their club. Meanwhile, past members reflected on how Key Club shaped them.

## Today's club

Lilly Chase, Key Club president, joined the club as a freshman. Now a senior and 17, Chase said she is proud of the club's work in park cleanups, charity fund drives and more. She said she has enjoyed being helpful, an ethic the club promotes.

Janet Sexton is in her sixth year as Key Club advisor. She said the club, which has 51 members, gives students an opportunity to do good works and develop skills.

"It gives kids a chance to serve, to be leaders and have fun," Sexton said.

Key Club members in December helped set up displays at the Festival of Trees and were servers at Pancakes with Santa.

Kiwanis Club President Jeff Kelso and member Tom Ditton attested to the excellence of Key Club members, past and present. They said the Hermiston Kiwanis sponsors both the Hermiston High School Key Club and the Umatilla High School Key Club, providing financial assistance and service opportunities.

"It's a good group of kids," Ditton said.



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

Members of the Hermiston High School Key Club pose for a group photo Jan. 12, 2022.



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

Kiwanis Club members Jeff Kelso and Tom Ditton take part in a Hermiston High School Key Club activity at a meeting Jan. 12, 2022.

## Making community leaders

Dorrn said he was a member of Key Club from 1971 to 1974, something he told to Kiwanis members at a meeting in January. While speaking with the Kiwanis, he showed them momentos from his involvement in Key Club.

Such relics included autographs from boxers Ali and heavyweight title challenger George Chuvalo. Dorrn met the pair on a Key Club trip to Vancouver, Canada. The two boxing greats were in town for an upcoming match in 1972, and they both made time to greet fans.

"They were fun to be around," Dorrn said of the boxers.

He said Ali asked him about Hermiston and whether the town had ever hosted a world heavyweight championship fight. The

commissioner said the champ was generous with his time.

Dorrn, a Kiwanian now, was a member of the Key Club when it first began. He said he has good memories of the club, which helped guide him to community service as a youth.

"I think Key Club is an organization from which members can get a lot," he said. "I'm a big believer in Key Club, for sure."

Another former Key Club member shared the importance of the club in her life. While she helped sell Christmas trees late last year, Kiwanis Club member Cindy Middleton discussed her present service to her community and her past involvement in the Key Club. Among her work in the area, Middleton is on the Festival of Trees committee and

the Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation.

She was a Key Club member in the early 1990s as a Hermiston High School student and served as a club officer. Kyle Kennison, a beloved educator, was the club's advisor. Hermiston's Kennison Field Complex was named after him.

"It was a community activity and a way for high school students to get involved in our community," Middleton said about the club.

She said community service was not new to her by the time she joined Key Club. Her family always worked for a better Hermiston. Also, she was a 4-H member, which encouraged participation in community activities. The Key Club, though, cemented her feelings, she said, and it gave her more local work to perform.

The involvement in the club had a practical benefit: the Kiwanis Club awarded her a college scholarship upon her high school graduation.

As a Kiwanis Club member for several years, she has returned periodically to the Key Club. She was a liaison for the clubs and a "chauffeur" for her son, taking him to Key Club activities.

"I think that Key Club gives our community a spirit of service," Middleton said. "It installs in our young people a sense of giving back, and that's what Hermiston is all about."

# Dairy Heifer Program kicks off 4th year in Morrow County

Hermiston Herald

Twelve Morrow County 4-H students and their families started a new journey Friday, Jan. 28, as they picked up dairy heifers from Threemile Canyon Farms to raise for eight months.

The Dairy Heifer Program, started in 2019, loans heifers to 4-H students, who care for and learn responsible animal management practices from Threemile Canyon Farms veterinarians and nutritionists throughout the year, according to a press release.

Dr. Jeff Wendler, Threemile's director of Livestock Operations, created and operates the program in collaboration with Morrow County OSU Extension Service and Morrow County 4-H.

"This program has been so rewarding for myself and everyone involved from Threemile Canyon Farms," Wendler said in the release. "The parents and students have been wonderful to work with and we are proud to partner with OSU and Morrow County 4-H to teach the next generation about the dairy industry."

Students interview before entering the program, and once selected work closely with Threemile staff on animal welfare, grooming and sportsmanship. Throughout the program, there are several vet checks and heifer weigh-ins, culminating in August, when participants show their animals at the Morrow County Fair, competing in showmanship, conformation and herdsmanship.

Lisa Wedam's daughter Isabel has participated in the program for three years, according to the press release, and said it's a wonderful opportunity to watch the kids grow and learn about their heifers.

Claire Lindsay, a first-year participant, said in the release she's very excited to be in the program.

"This is my first time showing in 4-H, and I'm super excited to start working with my heifer, named Milk Dud," Lindsay said.

Since the program started, 46 4-H'ers have participated, including the latest dozen. After the Morrow County Fair, the heifers are returned to Threemile and added back into the herd.

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