Kodiak 4-H leader to receive top Western award

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Fairbanks, Alaska—Barbara Zimmerman Hoedel started volunteering for 4-H in Kodiak when her daughter got her first horse at 8, and she continues to stay involved for her grandchildren and other youth in the community.

Hoedel will receive one of the two top Western region leader awards for her 34 years as a 4-H volunteer. She will be recognized with the 4-H Salute to Excellence Outstanding Lifetime Volunteer Award at the Western Region Leaders Forum March 21-24 in Hawaii.

Hoedel has worked as a project leader, recruited and trained new leaders, and organized and chaired special events ranging from a petting zoo and horse camps to horse shows, pancake breakfasts and other community events. For 15 years, she organized and accompanied teams to the state horse show and the Alaska State Fair, which involved a 12-hour ferry ride and six-hour drive each way. She currently serves as president of the Kodiak 4-H Leaders Council.

Hoedel said she loves working with kids and believes in the 4-H program for its mix of community service and skill-building activities.

“4-H is a nice combination of kids and education,” she said.

Marie Rice, the founder of Kodiak 4-H, helped nominate Hoedel for the award. She wrote, “She is great at getting youth to overcome shyness and gain skills to feel comfortable in performing before the public through demonstrations, horse shows, judging contests, etc.”

A certified therapeutic riding instructor, Hoedel recruits 4-H volunteers and their horses to offer a riding program for special needs children. She also organizes trail rides for St. Jude’s hospital. Community volunteer work has included arranging downtown trick or treating and arts activities for youth. She also volunteers in her church, in the schools and has led story time for young children at a coffee shop.

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