

Character Counts

District Agents Team Up to Offer Programs for Kids Statewide

GOVE, Kan. – It takes just a bit of water, vegetable oil, food coloring and alka seltzer for Jen Schoenfeld and Amy Lorenzen to teach kids the importance of getting along.

That's what creativity and teamwork can do.

"Well, of course, the oil and water don't mix because they are composed of different molecules," said Schoenfeld, a Golden Prairie Extension District agent.

She and Lorenzen, also a Golden Prairie extension agent, have developed the class, 'Character Counts,' in which they set the stage with the oil and water – two bodies that don't get along.

"We call [alka seltzer] our respect," Schoenfeld said. "What we are highlighting to students is that water molecules like other water molecules, and oil molecules like oil molecules. They stay separate unless you add the 'respect.'"

The chemical reaction of the antacid (a gas) brings the oil and water together. Kids learn a little about science, and a lot about respect for one another.

"Within relationships – teammates, classmates, friends and family -- if you don't have respect in that relationship then they will never come together and gel as a team, they will not understand each other and they will stay separate," Schoenfeld said. "But you add that



ABOVE: Rooks County 4-Her Katie Westhusin watches an antacid cause a chemical reaction, causing oil and water to mix. Westhusin participated in a 'Character Counts' workshop hosted by district extension agents at Rock Springs 4-H camp recently.

respect, just like you add that alka seltzer...it makes the oil and the water mix."

The lesson has become a popular one among school kids in the Golden Prairie district, which serves Trego, Logan and Gove counties. And recently, Schoenfeld and Lorenzen also brought their class to the Rock Springs 4-H camp.

"A lot of schools just don't have the time to do this type of programming because they are focused on other aspects of the academic world," said Lorenzen, a former high school teacher. "These are fun activities that allow the kids to experience things in a different way, get them to look at relationships, because at least from my point of view I think relationships are extremely important in the development of our youth and young adult population."

Separately, neither agent could have pulled off the lesson, they say. But in 2011, Gove County residents voted to join the Golden Prairie Extension District, allowing both agents to specialize more fully and share

District Agents Team Up to Offer Programs for Kids Statewide

Continued from page 1

their time and resources.

“It’s great to have a co-worker with whom I can team talk about this,” said Lorenzen, whose office is in Logan County. “[As county agents,] we wouldn’t have had time to go into the in-depth programs that we do now.

“By districting, extension is broadening its avenue of coverage and allowing agents to just expand their horizons also.”

Schoenfeld, whose office is in Gove County, noted that a children’s book about an ant and grasshopper helps to highlight differences for younger

children. The duo continues to adapt their programs to make them more relevant for more kids. They’ve also developed a three-part lesson for kids on spending and saving money.

“It’s been great,”

Schoenfeld said of the youth development series she teaches. As a district agent, “I have had the time to go ahead and create those lessons and then go and execute them, as well.”



Golden Prairie Extension District agent Jen Schoenfeld credits the district for allowing a concentrated focus on programs. It’s helped to create more in-depth programs for local residents, she says.