

MISSOURI RURALIST

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Harvest safety: Use caution at RR crossings

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Welcome back, Little House in the Ozarks

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Mr. 4-H

By JERILYN JOHNSON

Key Points

- Frank Graham has earned the title Mr. 4-H in Missouri.
- A top athlete, he turned down pro baseball for a career in ag.
- Graham helped establish the Missouri 4-H Foundation in '49.

IN the early 1940s, Frank Graham threw a mighty tough curveball for the University of Missouri baseball team. He helped lead his team to two Big Six Conference championships in 1941 and 1942, and attracted the attention of scouts from the St. Louis Browns.

Then, in the summer of 1942, Graham threw the biggest curveball of his life. Despite the fact that he had dreamed of playing professional baseball since he was a youngster on his family's dairy farm near Fair Grove, Graham turned down a professional baseball contract — surprising his coach, teammates and family.

Instead, Graham chose his other passion — agriculture — after college graduation and took a job as a county agent with University of Missouri Extension. During his 33 years in Extension, with time out serving his country in World War II, he worked in the Lawrence, Wright and Johnson county offices before joining the state Extension office in Columbia.

MU Extension soon discovered that Graham had a real talent for "pitching 4-H" to youth and volunteer leaders. In 1958, he was promoted to director of Extension 4-H Youth Development Programs, a position he held for 17 years. When he retired in 1975, the Missouri 4-H Foundation appointed him an honorary trustee — a position he still serves today.

"During the many years that

Mr. Graham served as state 4-H director, and for many years after, he has been recognized statewide as Mr. 4-H," says Don Henderson, a past executive director of the Missouri 4-H Foundation. "He has influenced tens of thousands of 4-H youth."

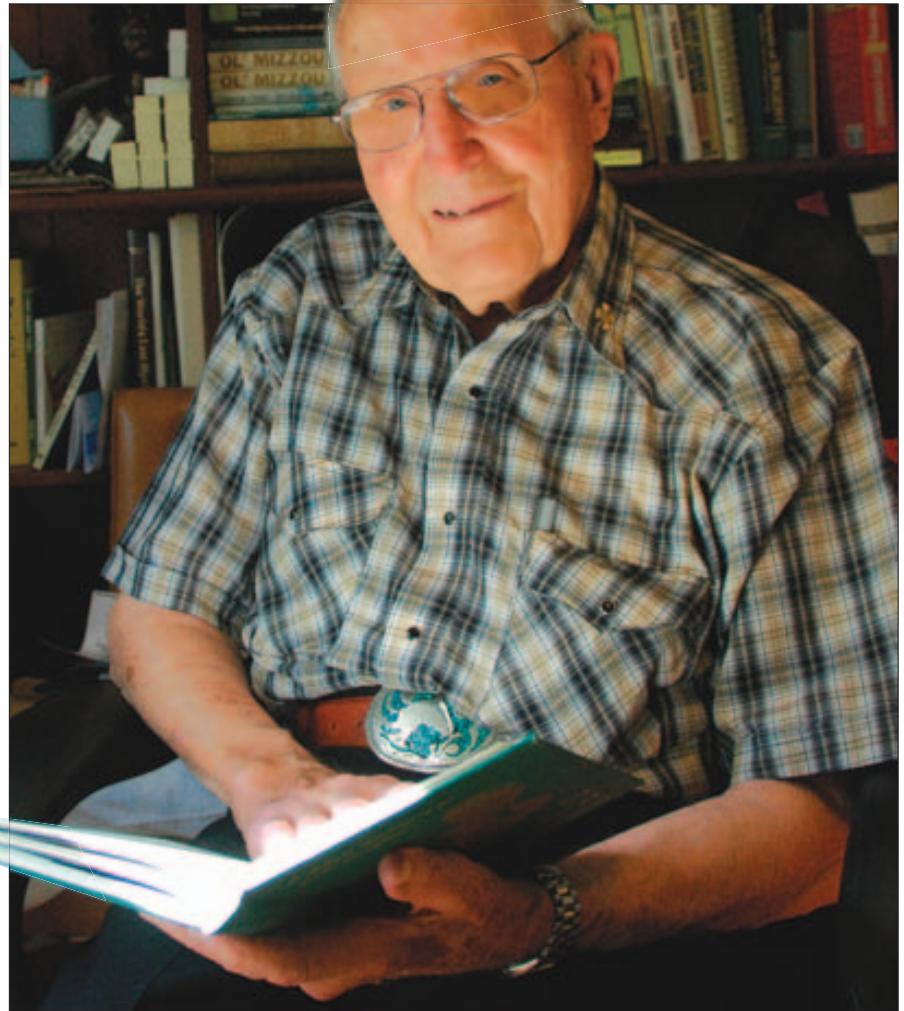
Strong 4-H roots

Graham has been involved in 4-H for a majority of his 89 years. He joined when he was 10 years old, enrolling in the swine project.

"I was fortunate to have a good 4-H Club leader named Ralph Ricketts," Graham says. "He was an early role model for me. He and my parents encouraged me to attend MU rather than go into baseball."

The Missouri 4-H Foundation, which Graham helped establish, will celebrate its 60th anniversary this fall. He is the last surviving member of the eight original founders. During the 50th anniversary in 1999, the foundation established the Frank Graham 4-H Leadership Fund. More than \$50,000 was raised in his honor.

In 2004, Graham received 4-H's highest honor: induction into the National 4-H Hall of Fame in Chevy Chase, Md.



4-H FOUNDER: "The idea of establishing a Missouri 4-H Foundation came from the grassroots," says Frank Graham, who served on the first board in 1949. "We needed a vehicle to help fund 4-H programs that state and federal dollars did not meet."

"To this day, Frank has an amazing ability to remember people, names, details and events that revolve around 4-H," says Robert "Bud" Hertzog, chairman of the Missouri 4-H Foundation board of trustees, from Lee's Summit. "The first time I met him was at

the Johnson County Fair, where I was showing my 4-H dairy project.

"Years later, when I joined the 4-H Foundation board, Frank and I struck up a conversation about my family," Hertzog says. "He recalled the exact place and date when my

parents were honored with a 4-H service award.

"Frank has set a high standard and positive example for Missouri 4-H. He continues to be its best ambassador."

■ Read more about Missouri 4-H history on pages 6 and 7.

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