

Showtime

Area youths put their cattle on display at county fair in Wheaton

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The cows they raise are nearly three to four times larger than they are, but Charlene and Allison Steininger have gained the respect of their prized animals and confidently showed off their countless hours of hard work Wednesday for crowds at the DuPage County Fair in Wheaton.

The Sugar Grove sisters, along with a number of other area youths, brought their cows to the 4-H and Junior Open Class Beef Judging during the opening day of the fair to share their passion for animals and hopefully nab a few purple ribbons in the process.

The teenagers, who live on a farm with about 25 cows, have been showing cattle since they were 8. Indeed, it has become part of a family tradition. Three of their cousins also presented their cattle at the fair.

"I bought my first steer when I was 8 years old and I was hooked," Charlene Steininger said.

Throughout her experiences with working with cattle, the 15-year-old and junior at Kaneland High School said she enjoys working with animals and the competitive nature of beef shows the most.

While 13-year-old Allison

"I didn't think any kid my age would or could do that."

Heidi Garidis, a 13-year-old Florida resident visiting relatives in the area, after watching her peers show cattle at DuPage County Fair

Steininger also loves working with animals, the Kaneland Middle School eighth-grader said she also likes that she can share her experiences with her sister and cousins.

Charlene showed five cows during the judging including Duke, Dutchess, Crown, Hope and Holly taking home the ribbon for Champion Beef Female Hereford among others to add to her collection.

Allison presented Scarlet, Patty, Tori and Gerken to the judges and was also rewarded with some placings including the Reserve Champion Beef Female All Other Breeds.

Although the actual beef show lasted for only a few hours, the preparation starts much earlier.

The youths must train their cows daily with showsticks to help get them ready for shows, wash them, comb them and feed them.

"People don't appreciate how much work goes into (showing cattle)," said

the Steininger's 14-year-old-cousin, Hannah Winters, who also showed three cows at the show.

Throughout this time, many of the trainers grow an attachment to their furry friends.

"It's hard not to," Allison Steininger said. "You see them every day."

The girls' mother, Wanda Steininger, said she is impressed with both her daughters' ability to show responsibility for another living thing in the way that they do.

"It's amazing to watch them mature and grow in responsibility," she said.

While interacting with farm animals like cows is common for the Steiningers, for some onlookers it is a rarity.

Algonquin resident Marie Duthie brought her 13-year-old niece, who is visiting from Florida, to the fair to get a glimpse of what farm life is really like.

Her niece, Heidi Garidis, was surprised to find her peers were actually the ones showing the cattle.

"I didn't think any kid my age would or could do that," she said.

While others like Bill and Marge Foss, of Glendale Heights, attended their first beef judging Wednesday out of curiosity of the judging process and their fascination of livestock.