



Press Release:

**FOOTBALLS SEND
THE OHIO 4-H CENTER KICK-OFF
INTO THE COUNTIES**

By Karen Daniels

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- As 4-H begins a new century of building the foundation of America's youth, Ohio's organization kicked off its campaign for a new building -- the first of its kind -- on The Ohio State University campus.

Governor Bob Taft honored state volunteers March 9 during the annual 4-H Volunteer Conference in Columbus and pointed out their achievements that have continued to make a difference in the lives of 4-H members.

Introduced for the first time to the public at the conference, the Ohio 4-H Center will tie 4-H youth, leaders and volunteers from throughout the state together and play a vital role in the perpetuation of 4-H in the state, linking the past with the present and the future.

"I don't need to tell any of you how much 4-H is able to make a difference in the lives of children and help them become capable, competent, caring and contributing members of society. It still amazes me that there are more than 25,000 adult and youth volunteers involved in the program here in Ohio and that there are more than 286,000 youths who benefited from it last year," Taft said.

Taft said he was proud of the fact that 4-H started in Ohio from humble beginnings in Clark County in 1902, and that 100 years later the organization was celebrating its effect on positive youth development.

"Part of the 4-H program's great future will be the new Ohio 4-H Center," Taft said. "I'm excited at the number of educational opportunities the new Ohio 4-H Center will be able to offer to thousands of volunteers and youth across the state and I believe the center will help propel the Ohio 4-H program well into the bicentennial celebration."

Discussion of such a building to offer a permanent home to 4-H on the Ohio State campus began more than 20 years ago. A limited display space in the Agricultural Administration Building no longer accommodates the program's goals for what was established as the youth phase of Ohio State University Extension by the university's founding fathers. Having a physical building on site would help ensure that 4-H will always be a part of the university.

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Completion of the center would carry youth into the next century with 4-H as technology continues to make the world smaller. The new center will serve as a focal point of collaborative interactions discussed and initiated throughout the years within several departments of the university, including sports, medicine, education and human ecology.

The center would be a facility for youth, adult volunteers, community organizations and all other Ohio State University partners, a training resource for other youth organizations and a location for Ohio State Extension programming reaching throughout Ohio. The flexible multi-purpose space would provide hands-on program opportunities for youth and volunteers, educational conference space and classroom facilities accessible to people from Ohio's 88 counties, the nation and the world.

Through the center, on-site education and experiential learning opportunities, distance education programs, a youth center, conference site, recruitment locale for Ohio State students and an outreach facility for community members would all be possible.

Marilyn Johnson, honorary chair of the Ohio 4-H Center Steering Committee, said making the dream of such a center into reality is the greatest gift of all -- a building to celebrate the past and build on the future of 4-H.

"I am so excited about the possibilities of a new 4-H center here in Ohio," Johnson said. "When I was in 4-H nearly 50 years ago, our motto was 'To make the best better.' This is still so important, but 4-H has also changed so much in the last 50 years. We are reaching an urban and inner city population that we as kids, down on the farm, did not even know existed.

"So many new programs have been added to meet all of the many new needs, but 4-H does not operate without volunteers, so the new building on the Ohio State campus will become a facility that will provide these 26,000 volunteers and youth development professionals within Ohio, the resources and experiences that they need to succeed to develop young people and their lives successfully. We need every 4-H alumni and friend of 4-H to help us make this dream of a new Ohio 4-H Center come true," Johnson said.

Ohio State President William E. Kirwan officially kicked off the campaign by unwrapping a gift of 88 footballs to be used by each county as it begins fund-raising efforts. The balls are each autographed by Athletic Director Andy Geiger, Head Football Coach Jim Tressel and two-time Heisman Trophy Winner Archie Griffin.

"At Ohio State we have many great traditions -- scarlet and gray is a tradition football is a tradition and 4-H is a tradition," Kirwan said as he tossed a football to a 4-H member. The footballs are a way of welcoming the center to the neighborhood on behalf of the athletic department, which will be right across the street from the center's site at the corner of Lane Avenue and Fred Taylor Drive, near State Route 315 -- what has been deemed "the new entrance" to the university.

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Thanking volunteers from communities throughout Ohio that will bring the campaign to every corner of the state, Kirwan emphasized the strong relationship between Ohio State and county Extension programs as a major objective of outreach and engagement for the university throughout Ohio.

"The proposed Ohio 4-H Center will provide a wealth of opportunities for youth, adult volunteers, the university community and everyone involved in 4-H," Kirwan said after the conference. "The center will be the hub of 4-H activities, including educational opportunities and conferences, and will also serve as a much-needed gathering place for thousands of youth and volunteers as they meet for state-wide leadership and program opportunities. The Ohio State University is delighted to lend its full support to the building of this center."

The university has committed the land and site for the center. Integral to making the \$12 million dollar dream a reality have been pledges from several corporate partners who have already stepped up to the plate. Grassroots support of individuals, alumni and 4-H members will be extremely important to reach the final goal and have the building completed early in 2004.

Ohio 4-H serves more than 286,000 youth, ages 5 through 19. Living in Ohio, one in six people have been involved in 4-H.

For more information visit <http://www.ohio4-h.org> or <http://www.ohio4-hcenter.org>, call (614) 247-6904 or write to the Ohio 4-H Office, 2120 Fyffe Road, Columbus, Ohio 43210.

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