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## **4-H Youth bring virtual zoo to Mary Cariola Center students**

### **Annual event goes virtual in the time of social distancing**

With COVID-19 forcing the cancellation of numerous events, members of Monroe County's 4-H Youth Development program put on creative hats in order to bring farm animals to students at Mary Cariola Center. The annual spring visit to the school's Elmwood Campus is always well received by teachers and students, and a highlight for members of Monroe County's 4-H Youth Development.

This year, 4-H Youth Development members and volunteers created short videos of their animals and provided them to Mary Cariola's 4-H Club Classroom. The classroom then offered to share with all of Mary Cariola's students and residents. The videos have been posted daily on the school's Facebook page and are permanently housed on the school website's learning resource page for everyone to enjoy.

Falling under the Social Studies and Science header on the school's COVID-19 Resources page are videos introducing "Oprah-Whinny-Free," the miniature horse, "Squirt," the tortoise, "Gigi," the pony, chickens, ducklings, and more. The short videos range from calming to cute to informative, and give students a look at animals on the farm. Find the link [here](https://www.marycariola.org/resources-during-covid19).  
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In past years, the annual petting zoo provided to Mary Cariola students and staff has been held in the gymnasium on the Elmwood campus. Here, students can touch the animals, ask the animals' caregivers questions, and get their pictures taken with their favorites. The petting zoo features familiar faces, domestic farm animals and pets, and joy for all who participate.

Mary Cariola Center is home to a long-standing 4-H club called Busy Bees, headed by teacher Kathy Lee, and taking place in her classroom. 4-H members learn arts and crafts, public presentations, community service, and more. Each Busy Bee has unique qualities and special needs that 4-H Positive Youth Development curricula has been adapted to accommodate. The initiative is inclusive, welcoming, and provides a safe space for youth of all abilities, characteristics, and interests.

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"The Annual Mary Cariola Petting Zoo is a highly-anticipated and exciting event for all involved – students, teachers, 4-H families and staff. We knew we couldn't just cancel the event, disappointing everyone in the process," says 4-H Program Manager, Susan Coyle.

"The collaboration between the school, and 4-H staff and volunteers ensured that the event would take place, albeit in a nontraditional format. While hands-on, personal interaction is always optimal, virtual learning has become a format to master during these unprecedented times."

The Monroe County 4-H Program is offered through Cornell Cooperative Extension to the youth of Monroe County. 4-H is a worldwide youth development program open to all youth ages 5 to 19, who want to have fun, learn new skills, and explore the world. In return, youth who participate in 4-H find a supportive environment and opportunities for hands-on or "experiential" learning about things that interest them.

Learn more at <http://monroe.cce.cornell.edu/4-h-youth-development>.



Above: DeAshaney, student at Mary Cariola Center, announces virtual petting zoo with her sister



Left: chickens on the farm & Oprah-Whinny-Free's photogenic side