

# For the Kids



Lorraine Parkinson (second from left) and her family continue to open their home to the young people of their rural community

## LET KIDS BE KIDS.

That's one of the philosophies Lorraine Parkinson lives by, whether as a leader with the Golden Rod 4-H club or when opening her acreage to neighbourhood children.

"I always wanted to call our [acreage] Park Meadow Acres, after my husband's parents' farm, but we never did," says Parkinson.

She and her husband, Jeff, have lived in the Airdrie area for 22 years, after moving here from Stettler.

"We wanted to live in the country as opposed to the city, so we bought four acres west of town," she says. "At that time, [Airdrie] had under 10,000 people. There were no traffic lights – just four-way stops. Things

have changed so much, and when the first set of traffic lights went in, I remember we were so excited!"

Parkinson says she personally doesn't have a farming background – that belongs to Jeff, who was raised in Ontario by parents who farmed, raised hogs and mink, grew corn and even ran a sawmill on the side. Although Jeff

## Lorraine Parkinson is recognized for her work with 4-H, but would rather talk about the youngsters

didn't exactly follow directly in their footsteps – he became a chemical engineer in Alberta's oilpatch, instead – when the opportunity came to buy the acreage, the couple jumped at it.

Having a growing family didn't hurt. The Parkinsons have four daughters – Taryn, Cassandra, Avery and Devon, with Devon being the youngest and in Grade 12 and the others working or studying elsewhere.

er stuff out there. Jeff built a playground, like the type you'd normally see at a city school, and we knew we needed that because we had the kids and we wouldn't be running into town all the time."

And, of course, you might as well call a playground a kid magnet.

"At one point, we had 35 kids living in the subdivision [nearby] and these kids would congregate at our place," says Parkinson. "There were constantly kids at our place and the parents knew where their kids were. We also had a nice little hill kids could come and toboggan on in the winter."

The demographics of the area have changed a bit, she says – more double-income-no-children households – but the acreage can still be a hub of activity. "[Several months] ago, we hosted a 4-H group from Strathcona County that rented [GoldenRod] Hall for a sleepover and they went into Airdrie to use the pool, and then they came to our house and we had a bonfire for them – many of these kids had never had s'mores in their life. It was pitch black outside but they found the playground, just like that!"

Parkinson's involvement with the Golden Rod 4-H Multi-Club dates back 14 years, to a time when there were thoughts of relocating the rural-based club to Airdrie. "I sat on the community board of GoldenRod Hall and [the board] asked how can we keep the club here, because it had been started by the women in our community," she says.

Parkinson describes the Golden Rod club, based out of the rural community hall northwest of Airdrie, as "non-live-stock-based. Projects we did last year in-

cluded welding, foods, photography and quilting – we drew on the Airdrie Quilt Guild to be our resource. This year we're also doing a pet project, as some of the kids board horses, so they will learn how to properly take care of the animal. Not showing, just basic animal care."

Parkinson says she's seen the club go from having mostly rural members to including more urban youngsters who want to take part in programs that include drama and art. "It doesn't just have to be ag-based stuff," she says. "The sky's the limit."

One of the most encouraging things Parkinson has seen is how young people involved with 4-H seem to develop not only initiative for projects, but initiative for something a lot of children seem to have forgotten about these days – how to play.

Parkinson recalls a recent community service day at the GoldenRod Hall: "There [was] a group of teenage girls doing their thing, and we were looking at 10-14-year-old girls playing tag and hide-and-seek. They can't do that in the city. Kids don't get to be kids these days the way we used to."

Although she eschews the idea of being rewarded for her work, her efforts with 4-H did result in her being nominated this year in the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) Small Town Heroes contest.

"I was very surprised – a lot of other people deserve that award, too," Parkinson says. "I always tell the parents, I'll do anything for your kids. You have to get the kids involved because they're our future, and if they're not involved, what kind of future will we have, especially if we want our communities to survive?" **life**



Parkinson says one of her earliest memories of her acreage is planning trees for a shelterbelt. "Our oldest daughter had a video camera with her and she'd come out [while we were planting] and shout, 'Movie, Dad!'" laughs Parkinson.

"We planted the trees and added oth-