

By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times Some of Seward County's 4-H youth will soon have a new room for some of their activities. Monday night, county commissioners gave officials with the county's K-State Research and Extension office the go ahead to use a room located next to the commission chambers for 4-H projects.

Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Agent Kathy Bloom said commissioner Jim Rice had called Tuesday morning to let her know that the commission had come to a consensus to let the Extension move the project forward.

"He will be getting with us next week to figure out outlets and little details of the plan, and then they'll start working on it," Bloom told the Leader & Times Wednesday.

Ag agent Kylee Harrison said the room can be used for any project or community club meetings that do not require kitchen space, and it will not be used for shooting sports. Livestock judging activities could take place in the room, and Harrison explained how that will happen. "With the livestock judging, they don't actually have the livestock there," she said. "They use Power Points and different Web sites that they go to. They could still have the actual judging there."

As for shooting sports, Harrison said those will continue to take place at the Seward County Fairgrounds and in the basement of the Extension's office.

"It just kind of depends on what they're doing at the time," she said.

The Extension office would also be home to food meetings, as would be the First Presbyterian Church due to the access of kitchen space in those buildings.

Bloom cheered the move, saying the room provides much needed space for the 4-H program.

"Most of all, it'll be lovely to have a space to keep all our equipment stored instead of having to cart it around," she said.

Robotics lab and photography activities would also take place in the room in the Seward County Administration Building. Harrison said youth got an early sneak peek at the room recently.

"Just last Saturday, the kids got to go there and put together thank you gifts for volunteers," she said.

Bloom said the room is likewise coming in handy for another project. Kids in 4-H are making 500 food bags for the county's upcoming County Government Days, which will take place next week at the Seward County Activity Center.

Harrison called the room a place to "spread out."

"A safe clean place where we can store our stuff and our people aren't constantly confused as to where an event's going to be held," Bloom said. "We kind of have a central location."

Harrison said the item on Monday's commission agenda was simply to ask for the room to be finished, as little work is necessary for completion.

"Right now, it doesn't have a ceiling," she said. "We would need to add a partial wall, carpet. We're basically just asking for it to be completed."

Bloom said when construction of the Administration Building was taking place a few years ago, the county had purchased additional materials and supplies, and for this reason, everything is already in place for work to begin.

The FCS agent added little in the way of money will likewise be spent on labor on upgrading the room.

"Our 4-H families are going to help paint and do some things like that," she said. "It sounds like the county's going to take care of a lot of the project. Jim's going to volunteer some of his time, and the county employees will do a little bit of it."

Bloom said work on the room will, hopefully, begin next week, with the room to be officially useful by summer. She added the Extension appreciates the support of the commissioners.

"They've been very good to us," she said.

The new room can also be useful with a growing number of youth participating in 4-H.

"We have increased our enrollment from 50 to 85," Bloom said. "Our volunteer numbers are up. We feel like we have the ground work laid to continue to see a lot of growth."

Harrison said commissioners saw little in the way of problems with the project. One issue did concern security in the Administration Building, but Harrison said county administrator April Warden assured both the board and Extension officials about access to the room.

"They have different key cards you can program for just specific rooms," Harrison said. "That really reassured them and us."

Bloom said commissioners actually first approached the Extension about the idea of converting the room for 4-H use.

“We didn’t even know about it,” she said. “We weren’t even actually seeking something. We were thrilled.”

Bloom said the Extension would like to have access to other facilities in the community, but at this point, she is happy with the progress that has been made.

“I would love to have a room at the Rec Center,” she said. “That’s my ultimate goal or a whole 4-H building for us, but for now, this is wonderful.”