

# **Rex Williams, the County Auctioneer, Honored with 4-H Alumni Award**

*By Tim Tesconi*

Rex Williams, the Sebastopol rancher and auctioneer who has been actively involved in 4-H most of his life, first as a member, then as 4-H parent, leader and tireless champion, is the 2023 recipient of the 4-H Alumni Recognition Award.

The annual award, given by the Youth Ag & Leadership Foundation of Sonoma County, honors a former 4-H Club member who continues to uphold the values of leadership, citizenship and community service that are the hallmarks of the 4-H program. Rex, who is 57, fits that profile on all counts. For decades he has been a familiar fixture at fairs and fund-raisers where he donates his time and auctioneering talents to benefit agricultural youth and the community.

Ranching and auctioneering are sideline endeavors for Rex who is the vineyard maintenance manager at St. Francis Winery & Vineyards in Santa Rosa. He has worked at the winery for 25 years while raising sheep, hay and cattle in partnership with his wife Kerry. In 2008, the Sonoma County Fair named Rex and Kerry the North Bay Ranchers of the Year.

For his part, Rex said 4-H defined his life and made him the person he is today. Rex and Kerry, who also was in 4-H, have two grown children, Wyatt and Olivia, both former 4-H Club members.

“You never really get out of 4-H, you just kind of change uniforms,” Rex said. “First, you’re the little kid in the white and green uniform, then the parent and

leader guiding the little kids in the white and green uniforms. Then someday you might be guiding grandkids in the white and green uniforms.”

Rex said what he loves about 4-H is the culture of care and guidance passed from one generation to the next.

“The whole thing is that you get involved because someone in 4-H did something for you and you want to give back and help the next generation along so they can help the next generation,” said Rex, who was born in Petaluma. He joined the Cinnabar 4-H Club when he was 9. His 4-H leader was Ettamarie Peterson, the beloved bee lady of Petaluma, who was honored with the 4-H Alumni Award last year.

When Rex was 11 his family moved to Potter Valley in Mendocino County. He was a member of the Potter Valley 4-H and raised hogs and dairy heifers. He also did project demonstrations and public speaking.

“It was public speaking that got me enjoying being in front of people and making them laugh. For me the natural thing was to become an auctioneer and be on stage,” said Rex, who at 18 enrolled in the Western Auctioneering School in Montana and, as the country song goes, became a full-fledged auctioneer.

Actually, said Rex, the first stirrings to be an auctioneer started when he was 10 years old. He had tagged along with his grandfather George Straub to one of Steve Dorfman’s farm estate sales in Petaluma. Dorfman, who raised Suffolk sheep as a 4-H member, was a legendary auctioneer and charismatic agricultural leader until his death.

For 35 years, Rex has been one of the auctioneers at the Sonoma County Fair, selling market animals raised by 4-H and FFA members.

For more than three decades he has done many benefit auctions for organizations including Sonoma County Farm Bureau, the Youth Ag & Leadership Foundation, SRJC Ag Trust, Elsie Allen Boosters and more.

Rex will be honored at the Youth Ag & Leadership Foundation's annual fund-raising barbecue on Aug. 26 at Richard's Grove and Saralee's Vineyard, the Windsor wine estate now owned by Jackson Family Wines.