

Catherine Berry named Grand Champion

By Paula W. Roy
Special to Irregular

PHILLIPS — The Franklin County Agricultural Society recently named Catherine Berry of Phillips its Grand Champion in the Market Steer Competition at Farmington Fair.

According to the young lady's 4-H leader, Joy Smith, Berry is the first in her club to win this "coveted prize" for a market steer. O'Reilly, her beef short horn steer, weighed in at 1,315 pounds. He was purchased by local farmer, Bob Thorndike, at the auction held near the close of fair week for \$2 a pound.

O'Reilly came to Maine from Pennsylvania when he was just a calf. He was delivered to More Acres Farm, Smith's farm in East Dixfield. Berry met him there and began the work of raising him. Later, O'Reilly moved to Berry's grandfather's farm on Tory Hill in Phillips. There the real work began, getting O'Reilly ready for fair season.

All spring and into the summer, Berry and O'Reilly worked on training for show. The steer had to learn to be led with a halter and how to "set up" for the judges with his feet placed just so. Berry trained O'Reilly with a "show stick," which she described as "almost like a ski pole" with a little hook at the end. Since steers don't like to stand still, Berry explained that the little hook came in handy for scratching and helping O'Reilly relax.

Things got off to rather a rough start. O'Reilly wasn't very cooperative at the beginning. Berry's mom, Lori Berry, told about one night when her daughter came home from her grandfather's farm "covered with mud and her belly all scratched to pieces." This was the result of O'Reilly's first time on the halter. He dragged Berry the length of the farm's driveway. Berry eventually was able to get her cell phone out of her pocket and call her grandfather, John Lisherness, to come help her.

"O'Reilly got the John Deere treatment after that," Berry said, "Grandpa led him around the pasture with the tractor."

He "didn't do so well" at his first few shows either, but as fair season continued O'Reilly became "more finished" and the ribbons and prize money began to accumulate. Berry and her prize steer earned well over \$1000 for their work this year. Berry will use her winnings to "pay grandpa back" and buy animals to train and show next year.

Throughout the summer, Berry camped with her 4-H leader at all the favorite Maine fairs, including Monmouth, Litchfield, Topsham, Union, Skowhegan and Windsor. Many nights, after a long day of caring for O'Reilly, putting him through his paces, and helping with the other animals as well, bedtime would find



Catherine Berry, Mt. Abram freshman and 4-H participant since she was 9 years old, displays the ribbons she won this year. Berry is holding the plaque with the picture of O'Reilly, her Grand Champion Market Steer. (Paula Roy photo)

Catherine already sound asleep in the cow barn, curled up on a pile of grain bags or under a tarp on top of the hard wooden show box.

It was at Farmington Fair, O'Reilly's last show of the season, where he and Berry claimed their Grand Champion award, the most prestigious offering of the 4-H fair circuit.

"I don't think she quite believed it at first," Berry's mother said when asked about her daughter's reaction as Cat was "tapped" by the judge after the final evaluation.

But "Grandpa leaped right off the bleachers!" Grandpa and Gram, John and Sue Lisherness, have been instrumental in Berry's 4-H career.

"Gram started talking to me about it when I was around 8," Berry related, "She was in 4-H when she was young. She knows how much I love animals and said I should try it."

Berry, now a freshman at Mt. Abram Regional High

School, took her gram's advice and has been actively involved in the program ever since, including showing animals since she was 9, the first year she became eligible. Besides O'Reilly, Berry has raised market lambs, a beef heifer, a dairy cow, and even a couple of pigs, Orville and Wilbur. During the fair season when Hurricane Katrina raised such havoc in the south, Berry donated half of the prize money from her market lamb to the victims.

"She's learned a lot of lessons," her mom said, "I've seen a huge change in her as far as confidence and independence. It's been very good for her."

Berry also sees her 4-H experiences as a step towards her career of choice. She hopes to be a traveling veterinarian, visiting farms to tend the livestock. She also dreams of a farm of her own on which she will raise beef and dairy critters.

Maybe she'll have horses, too. Horses are her favorite, even though she doesn't get to show them.

"Grampa says you can't eat 'em or milk 'em, so we don't have 'em," Berry states bluntly.

However, she isn't entirely "horseless." Steve Smith, also of Phillips, lets her work with his draft horses every now and then, which is a special treat for the young animal lover.

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