

Photo/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Rob O'Connor, 17, and his brothers Rick, 14, and Jamie, 10, work on preparing their entry for the Markham Fair. The O'Connors are a true Markham Fair family, with each member contributing entries into a variety of competition categories.

Markham Fair

O'Connor family gears up for the fair

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The months leading up to the Markham Fair can be counted on as being busy ones for the many families who put their talents to work and enter exhibits each year.

For Dick and Evelyn O'Connor and their three sons, Rob, 17, Rick, 14 and Jamie, 10, these months are particularly hectic. Not only do they enter their Hereford cows in most of the classes, but Evelyn and the boys each enter a huge number of other items in various General Exhibit categories. "We usually end up entering so many things that they deliver the exhibitor tags to our house, because it costs them so much to mail them," Evelyn laughs.

The walls of the O'Connors' country kitchen are a good indication of their many successes at the Markham Fair and other fairs as well. Scores of red, blue and white prize ribbons adorn the room, along with rows of wooden plaques and shining trophies, each memento rekindling a fond memory of the year in which they were won.

Evelyn points out, "The competition is fine, but I think the participation is the main part of it. The kids have learned to cope with losing and to accept winning, and I think that's important."

On one wall hangs some past year's art entries showing the talents of

14-year old Rick. One is colorful, mixed-media parrot which earned him the Junior prize last year at the Markham Fair. "Actually that was the big motivation to putting Rick into the Arts program at Unionville High School next year," adds Evelyn.

Showing cattle at the Markham Fair is something which Evelyn grew up with. Her parents have been entering Herefords at the Markham Fair since the early 1960s.

Getting the Herefords ready for show is quite a job in itself. "Outside of proper care and feeding, there's a long preparation for getting them ready," Evelyn said. "You just don't take them from the pasture and bring them in." She explains the process which takes many months prior to the Fair, involving daily washing, brushing and clipping to mold the cow's hair in order to hide the faults and accent the good points of the animal.

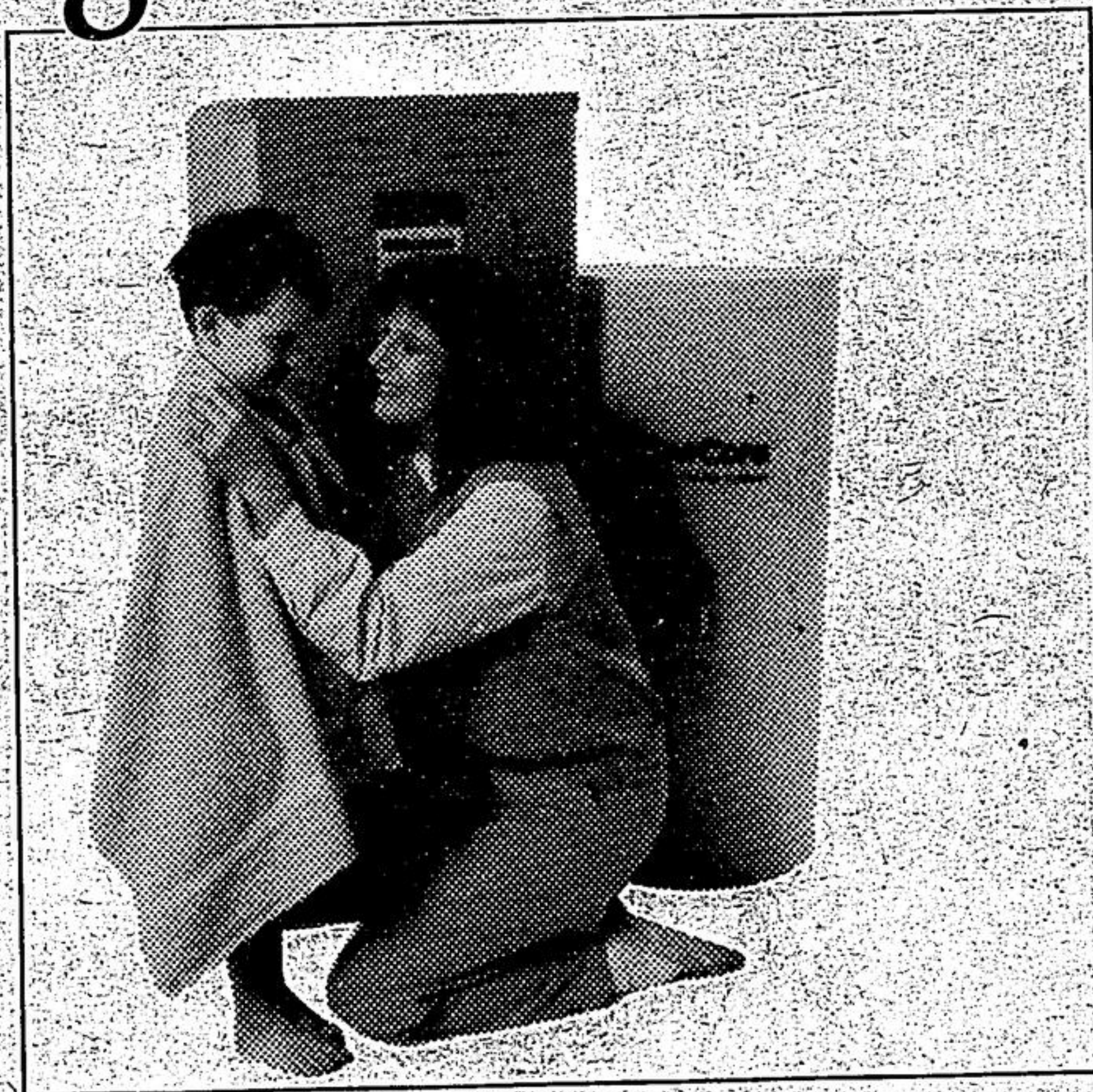
Just before the showing, the cow must be dressed with shaving cream to create a gloss, with wax or glue applied to the legs tail and head. "The tail is waxed to add height and length and the head is glued to give the illusion of it being longer," she notes. "It takes about an hour before the show to get them ready, then right after, they're taken to the wash rack and it's all washed out."

All three boys are quick to credit their mom for being the "major coordinator" of all their efforts. Says Rick, "If our mom wasn't here, I don't think we'd do any of it. She asks us what we want to do and we tell her. And if we don't know what to do, she explains it to us and let's us choose." Evelyn adds, "As each item gets done, it goes into a pile. I'm sure they enter well over 100 things each and whatever gets completed goes to the fair." Rob jokes, "Three days before, we hardly even sleep. We just go at it."

Between Dick and Evelyn and the three boys, they've entered everything from cattle, pigeons and rabbits, to antiques, crafts, Christmas items, photography, art, flowers, dried flower arrangements, baking, corn and even bales of hay. "I think the most time consuming things are the arts, crafts, flowers and baking," Evelyn notes.

Rick maintains that he inherited his artistic talent from his mother. Evelyn has entered and won many times in the art category. One year, she stayed up all night to finish a picture. "But when I went to the fair and found out I'd won, it was all worth it," she recalls.

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