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OUR INVESTMENT IN YOUTH: WHY ALL WOOD SCIENTISTS SHOULD GET BEHIND THE 4-H WOOD SCIENCE AWARDS PROGRAM

There has been a lot of youth-bashing of late. Some say that young people don't know how to read, they don't know how to write, they can't solve math problems if it requires a two-step solution, they don't know when the Civil War was fought, and they might not even know which countries border the U.S. You have all seen the statistics, and they are shocking. I don't know of any study that has rated today's youth on their knowledge of wood, but if there had been such a study, what do you think it would have shown? What would you have wanted it to show, and can SWST members do anything about it?

Now for the good news! *Wood* magazine (Meridith Corporation) and ninety of its advertisers, DEFT, Inc. (The Wood Finish People), and SWST have joined together to sponsor the 4-H Wood Science Awards Program. Universities that teach wood technology are being asked by President Arganbright to add their support.

Why is this important, and what could it mean in the long run for wood science and for wise use of natural resources? It means that at least several hundred thousand youths will select wood science as their 4-H project. Just knowing that so many youths will know there is such a thing as wood science should be exciting to SWST members. We have suffered long from lack of identity. Those who select wood science projects will actually learn something about wood, and all five million 4-H young people will learn that wood science exists, because their 4-H friends will get awards for having completed wood science projects. And some of these 4-H youths might even be led to wood science as a career because of being introduced to wood science in 4-H.

Note that I did not even bother to tell you what 4-H is, because it is such a well-known youth development program. It costs about \$90,000 a year to sponsor a full-scale 4-H national awards program. Beginning in 1990, *Wood* will provide \$31,000, DEFT will provide \$30,000, SWST will provide \$5,000, and the SWST Board urges the universities to do their part. The full level of support will provide encouragement to 4-H youth everywhere to compete for county, state, and national awards, trips to the National 4-H Congress, and scholarships.

Editor Larry Clayton of *Wood* magazine (Dec. 1989, page 6) wrote an editorial titled, "We're Investing in the Next Generation of Woodworkers." He says, "Our \$31,000 contribution will help to underwrite the efforts of this fine program and hopefully instill a healthy interest in woodworking among this country's next generation of home-woodworking hobbyists." He goes on to urge readers of *Wood* magazine to call their county extension office and volunteer to help with the program, to "help preserve woodworking's rich heritage."

There are many ways that SWST members can help, too. The Board asked me

to continue to chair the SWST 4-H Wood Science Committee, and to represent SWST in developing the 4-H wood science awards program with *Wood* and DEFT and others. You can help me make wood science so challenging and interesting that some of these 4-H youths will select wood science careers, and the rest will know how to use wood properly. Call me at (202) 447-5119 to volunteer, or to offer suggestions.

Each of us should thank the other sponsors and encourage the universities in our area to get behind the 4-H program. We can help prepare educational materials. We can help judge projects. We can use our knowledge of wood to help the next generation of Americans learn to appreciate wood.

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