



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Despite health issues that required her to use a wheelchair, Melissa Jo Szucs was an active 4-H participant who looked forward to the county fair every year.

‘She lived and breathed the fair’

Teen remembered at county fair she loved

By Scott Williams
swilliams@wolfrivermedia.com

For 15 years, Shawano County Fair time was Melissa time.

Melissa Jo Szucs, a teenager from the town of Richmond, was a lifelong 4-H'er who cherished the county fair so much that she could barely bring herself to leave on closing day.

“Just one more lap?” she would ask, urging her parents to circle the fairgrounds one last time before heading for the exit.

For those who knew Melissa, it is hard to imagine that the county fair will go on without her this year. The little girl with the big smile succumbed to cancer June 18 at age 15.

Family and friends are making sure that Melissa is remembered when the fairgrounds, starting Wednesday, are filled with the excitement, fellowship and traditions

that she treasured.

“She really believed that the fair should be every day of the year,” said her mother, Vicky Szucs. “It is kind of like home, and everybody comes home for a few days.”

Inside the Junior Fair Building, where Melissa participated in countless 4-H exhibitions, members of her 4-H club will maintain a heartfelt memorial to her throughout this year's fair. The special display will feature photographs of Melissa alongside some of her past winning contest entries.

The Wolf River 4-H Club also will unveil a park bench that woodworking club members crafted with an engraved remembrance of Melissa.

Club leader Terri Dallas said the other boys and girls in the club wanted to honor Melissa and share her story with other fair-goers. Having the county fair without seeing Melissa's smiling face in the crowd will be difficult for everyone who knew her, Dallas said.

“The fair meant so much to her,” Dallas said. “She was everywhere.”

Born in Shawano on Oct. 3, 1999, Melissa was introduced to the county fair almost immediately. Her mother was an active 4-H leader, and her father, Jim, worked as maintenance supervisor on the fairgrounds. She attended her first county fair before her first birthday.

When she was 2 years old, Melissa was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor that was inoperable. The cancer eventually spread and left the young girl unable to walk or use her right hand.

Adjusting to a wheelchair and training herself to be left-handed, Melissa attended Shawano public schools and excelled in her classes. She also joined 4-H and insisted on not allowing health challenges or physical limitations to keep her away from any club activity.

Her parents recall that Melissa outlived many dire prognoses from doctors, and seemed determined to experience a full childhood.

Never did she enjoy life more than

SEE FAIR, A2

“She really believed that the fair should be every day of the year.”

VICKY SZUCS, Melissa's mother