



# BLUE AND GOLD

## Pennsylvania FFA Happenings

**ACTIVATE: Purpose-Passion-Potential**  
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## Pennsylvania Agriculturalists Honored at National FFA Convention

JILL PALMER

Pennsylvania FFA State Reporter

The American Degree is the highest honor that can be awarded to members in the National FFA Organization. In Indianapolis, five individuals were nominated by Pennsylvania to receive their Honorary American FFA Degree.

Tom Hojnowski grew up in Hamburg, Pennsylvania, where he developed his love for agriculture on the farm and quickly making hay. He soon developed a passion for agricultural education which led him to getting his certifications and bringing back the agriculture program in 2003 at Canton High School. Hojnowski credits his success to the farmers who had been his role models since he was 12. He also loves being able to work with his students and give them meaningful opportunities that will last a lifetime. He said his favorite part of being an agricultural educator is that FFA offers opportunities for anyone who is interested in pursuing them, and he loves being able to watch and facilitate those who take on those opportunities and find success within them.

Hojnowski now lives with his wife, Tracy, on their 80 acre beef, horse, and poultry farm in Bradford County. His daughter Tricia is currently serving her year as the Pennsylvania FFA state chaplain. Hojnowski was able to watch his daughter be handed her American FFA Degree the same week in which he received his Honorary. As for the future of working with FFA and its members, Hojnowski is excited to see new success and greater achievements in those not only in his classroom, but in Bradford County where he resides.

The year 1985 was big for Debra Seibert, one of the agriculture instructors at Manheim Central High School in Manheim, Pennsylvania. During this year she was approached with the news of this position and applied. Seibert knew that she was meant for this role. She attended high school at Killingly High School Vocational Agriculture Program in Danielson, Connecticut. For her, this Vo-Ag program seemed like a perfect fit with her interest in livestock and her 4-H and FFA SAE projects including a flock of Cheviot sheep, veal, capons, spinning wool, and farm caretaking entrepreneurship. Seibert believes that FFA is all about taking risks for her students, and seeing students work through all of their four years in the program and finding career success is something she enjoys about being an agricultural educator.

Seibert says that she is looking forward to retirement where she can offer her time to volunteer in her community and give back to the profession and FFA members that have treated her so well over the years.

Dr. John Ewing of Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences graduated from West Snyder High School in Beaver Springs, Pennsylvania, and then served as a Pennsylvania state FFA officer in 1996-1997. Knowing that he wanted to be an agricultural educator, he completed his degree at Penn State and taught at Octonara High School for three years before moving to Ohio. Here, he earned his master's and doctorate degrees in agricultural Extension and education from Ohio State. In 2006, Ewing was then offered a job teaching as a faculty member at Penn State.

Being involved in the process of teaching future educators, Ewing said, "I really enjoy the relationships that I have formed over the years with students and teachers that I would not have experienced if it were not for the FFA. I see so many great friendships formed because of this organization. Just as importantly, I love seeing the next generation of agricultural leaders in action, as members of FFA." Ewing resides in Warriors Mark with his wife and three children as he continues educating the teachers of tomorrow.

Rick Ebert is no stranger to the blue and gold FFA jacket. Ebert served as the Derry FFA chapter president in high school and went on to receive his Keystone Degree. He then went to Penn State and graduated with a degree in dairy science. He said, "My FFA experience prepared me to be engaged in agriculture, so I became involved with Farm Bureau where I served as vice-chair of the state Young Farmer & Rancher Committee, and was later appointed to the American Farm Bureau's Young Farmer & Rancher Committee. My FFA training – particularly parliamentary procedure – helped me as I became president of Westmoreland County Farm Bureau and now as president of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau." Ebert enjoys interacting with the young people of the FFA. He said, "I am energized by their enthusiasm and optimism. Whenever I see blue jackets, I am inspired by their commitment to being excellent leaders for agriculture's future." Of course working for the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau keeps Ebert directly involved with working with FFA members, and he can't wait to meet more FFA members. Rick firmly believes each new

day brings new opportunities and challenges, and is very encouraged by FFA members that the next generation is willing and able to meet the needs of our vocation and global economy. "I look forward to interacting with, and getting to know, each new state officer team and helping them to see that they have a bright future in agriculture, and of course, in Farm Bureau. The FFA is an excellent leadership incubator, and organizations like Farm Bureau are ready to welcome blue jackets into our fold."

Sam Kieffer grew up on a grain and beef farm in Northumberland County and was active in the Mahantango FFA chapter at Line Mountain High School. While in the FFA, he served as a delegate at several FFA state conventions and had the great experience of serving on the nominating committee. Today, he works for Pennsylvania Farm Bureau and advocates for all types of agriculture and all sizes of farms. Before joining Farm Bureau's staff, Kieffer was in the military and worked in higher education. Both occupations involve some of America's best people, but he says the longer he was away from the men and women of agriculture, the more he wanted to go back to agriculture. "I am glad that I can use my experiences both in, and outside of, agriculture to benefit the FFA. I am grateful for the opportunity to give back as a member of the Pennsylvania FFA Foundation Board." When Kieffer was asked what he loved about working with FFA members, he said, "The FFA is more than agriculture, it's a leadership organization. The motto "Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve" encompasses the life-cycle of leadership. Leadership begins with developing and honing one's skills; and is refined when these skills are put into practice. True leadership is demonstrated when one gives back to the community and others through service. I enjoy watching hundreds of students don their new FFA jacket for the first time each year at the Farm Show, and thinking about the impact these future leaders will have in their local communities and beyond."

Kieffer is very much looking forward to continuing to be a part of the Pennsylvania FFA Foundation. He said that he enjoys watching state officers grow and assisting the FFA in raising funds to give FFA members the opportunities that they work so tirelessly for. Kieffer also enjoys spending time with his wife of 12 years, and they have two children.

## On the Road Again

FROM THE OFFICER'S STATION



GARRETT JENKINS

There always seems to be a routine part of my day that I cannot recall morning, of course. During this time, I turn the key, crank up some tunes, and wait for the frost to depart the windshield. As I begin my commute, either to a teammate's house or an FFA chapter, it all seems to become a blur until I hear the voice of Siri proclaim, "the destination is on your left." Having no memories of my daily commute is beginning to make me wonder if there is time that I am letting slip by? This is an example of knowing our purpose is essential to making the most of the time spent engaging with others. If that purpose is to help others succeed and make them realize the opportunities that lie within the blue corduroy, then I must not let any moment slip away.

My teammates and I are constantly answering the questions about our experiences. I am always capable of listing off many of these times spent with members who bleed blue and gold throughout the commonwealth. Most recently, I found myself thrown into a city of more than 64,000 individuals who held the same passion for transforming their purpose to action. The energy and enthusiasm that was packed into Indianapolis for the week-long National FFA Convention is indescribable.

On the delegate floor, I found myself caught up in forming tunnels for the national officers, the occasional dab, as well as many other dance moves to be featured on the big screen. Watching the big screen debut the organization's largest membership of nearly 650,000 members, I was encouraged to return home to keep fulfilling the team's shared purpose of representing more than

12,700 Pennsylvania FFA members to the best of my abilities. Although I walked away a bit sleep deprived, I came home refreshed to "ACTIVATE" the purpose, passion and potential in all of those I encounter.

The state officer team has returned home traveling to meet with different FFA chapters. While commuting, I have made it a goal to spend time reflecting on my travels. In the past month, it is safe to say that I have met more than 700 members in about 10 chapters. I have seen a variety of class pets, these companions provide many opportunities for students to keep records on supervised agricultural experiences. While visiting some chapters in our western region, one animal that I enjoyed being up close with was the elk that Jacob Kline and I got to experience right outside of his car window. Moving into "canyon country" this past week, my travels brought Jacob and I to some peaceful and amazing sights. The sights do not match up to the hospitality, laughs and memories made along the way with every unique chapter we spend time with.

As I turn to the next page of my time left to serve, I can proudly say that seeking out the potential of students who shine bright with purpose and passion in and out of the classroom has been the most unforgettable time of my life. As I look ahead, Mid-Winter Convention, ACES and SLCC will bring even more defining moments for Pennsylvania FFA. I challenge us to give thanks this season, as I am truly thankful for my time spent with every member along the way.

*Editor's note: Garrett Jenkins is the Pennsylvania FFA state sentinel.*

## Cloister FFA Connects With Its Community

JILL PALMER

Pennsylvania FFA State Reporter

The Cloister FFA chapter's 2016 theme is: Amplifying their voices to share and spread the message of hard work and agriculture.

This Ephrata, Pennsylvania, chapter is no stranger to the meaning of hard work and community service.

The Cloister FFA chapter got its start on the second day of October 1961. This date began the era of community service, dedication and leadership for this FFA chapter. Beginning their knowledge of service starts in the classroom.

Curriculum in this agriculture department includes: Intro to ag mechanics, biotechnology, animal science, and wildlife and natural resources. After their passion for agricultural education starts, students are soon finding themselves out of the classroom and into the role of workers. The students keep track of projects they work on outside of class, known as Supervised Agricultural Experiences. The students receive a better understanding of what it means to stay committed to hard work and benefit from their education. Typical SAE projects include taking care of horses and sheep, which are traditional to the area. Within these projects students engage their ability to properly feed, clip and even show their animals in local fairs and expositions. Putting all of these skills together outside of the classroom is highly beneficial in the race to compete at the Pennsylvania State FFA Convention held at Penn State main campus. Students also attend sessions with guest speakers, and are rewarded for all their hard work. At this past State Convention, Cloister FFA was no stranger to the spotlight as students placed first in events like talent, and FFA Creed speaking and then had the opportunity to move on to the national level in October. Members also received awards for their record-keeping skills on their SAE projects. As competitions were heating up, so was this group's desire to serve their community. During their school year

FFA members from this chapter hold many events such as tent-city tours at the Ephrata Fair, the fruit sale, ice-cream social, and even an event they call Corny Day.

During tent-city tours, members give kindergartners hands-on experience with animals and agriculture. This chapter's fruit sale and fundraisers go beyond the typical program by including a chicken fundraiser, cheesecakes and poinsettias which they grow especially for their community members. As agricultural education is important at all levels, this chapter continues educating their community at the middle school level by holding Corny Day. These members take off to the school farm and show middle schoolers just how corn is grown and all of the unique uses for it.

Showing teachers appreciation is also highly important to these FFA members, and they show this by hosting an ice cream social each year. Members serve ice-cream and other treats to their teachers during lunch to show their appreciation of their hard work.

Awards for their hard work as they recruit members and create unique projects are shown at the Mid-Winter Convention in January at the Farm Show Complex. During this convention, Keystone Degrees, the highest honor a Pennsylvania FFA member can receive, and first-year member jackets are handed out. This past year Cloister FFA had five members zip their blue and gold corduroy up for the first time, and three members received their Keystone Degrees.

As Cloister FFA continues to take part in seeing the need to educate themselves and their communities, we are sure to see more unique service projects and advocating tools come from this FFA chapter very soon.

