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Pennsylvania's Top Four Named Golden Owls

THOMAS STRONG
State FFA Reporter

Farming is the backbone of America, but recent trends show a declining number of students who are studying agriculture.

To shed light on this trend, Nationwide, the No.1 farm insurer in the U.S., established the Golden Owl Award in 2018 to honor contributions of Iowa and Ohio agriculture teachers and the importance of agricultural education for future industry leaders. The 2019-2020 Golden Owl Award was expanded to include California, Illinois, Iowa, Ohio and Pennsylvania. Nationwide is also investing \$5,000 in each participating state's FFA organization to further support aspiring agriculture professionals.

"We created this award to bring attention to the growing need for agricultural teachers in this country," said Brad Liggett, president of agribusiness at Nationwide. "These talented individuals have a tremendous impact on the students and communities they serve. The nominations highlight the passion and inspiration they impart on their students, fellow teachers and community members. Following the inaugural Golden Owl Award, the Iowa Ag Educator of the Year saw a 30-student increase in his agricultural shop class. We hope that providing teachers with additional resources and recognition will help to boost their programs and provide students with an optimal learning experience."

The Golden Owl Award is the result of partnerships between Nationwide, California FFA, California Farm Bureau, Illinois FFA, Illinois Association of Vocational Agriculture Teachers, Farm Credit Illinois, Compeer Financial, Iowa FFA Foundation, Ohio FFA, Ohio Farm Bureau, Pennsylvania FFA and the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau.

The four finalists are:

Northern Region

David Steinfelt from Athens Area High School was nominated for many reasons including his wide range of skill sets, placing his students first, and his commitment to the FFA. One of his greatest student success



Renee Cambuzzi from McGuffey High School.

stories is of the Jelliff family. Five Jelliff boys graduated from the Athens FFA program. Each of their supervised agricultural experience were focused around the family business, Jelliff's Maple.

Eastern Region

Mark Anderson of Elizabethtown Area High School was chosen as the eastern region finalist due to his strong impact that he has on all his students. In the classroom he does not just teach agriculture education but shows his true passion for the industry. He looks into his students to see the true potential that they hold, and he adapts to each student individually. He prepares students for their lives outside of high school and for the rest of their adult lives.

South-Central Region

Kelly Bier from Shippensburg Area High School is most definitely one of Pennsylvania's finest agricultural educators. She believes in a sense of community for her students as well as her school as a whole.



Mark Anderson from Elizabethtown Area High School.

Day in and day out she prepares her students to be true advocates for agriculture. She also provides the best atmosphere of learning for all the of students, recently by raising \$40,000 to be able to build a greenhouse for her students and community.

Western Region

Renee Cambuzzi of McGuffey High School is an instrumental part of the success of the McGuffey FFA chapter. She has helped to grow the agriculture education program to two teachers over her tenure at McGuffey High School, as well as expanding what has been taught in the classroom to include more opportunities for students, like mechanics and greenhouse production. Using the three-circle model of agricultural education as a guide, Cambuzzi makes an impact on her students every day.

Good luck to these four individuals. We look forward to crowning one of our four state finalists as the 2019-2020 PA State Agricultural Educator. The State Golden



Photos provided by the Pennsylvania FFA
Kelly Bier from Shippensburg Area High School.



David Steinfelt from Athens Area High School.

Owl Award will be presented at the PA FFA Convention in June.

Finding a Home Within Blue and Gold



Photo provided by Pennsylvania FFA
Michael Riggs

MICHAEL RIGGS

Pennsylvania FFA State Secretary

"Your year of service does not begin tomorrow, a week, or even a month from now. It has already begun."

These are the first words that my team heard right after being elected. For one year we are given this opportunity and it's up to us to make the most of it. While running for state office, I was encouraged to find my "why." Why I was running for state office, why I wanted to dedicate my year, and why I wanted to give back to this organization.

Having the opportunity to serve as a state FFA officer has been a dream of mine since my beginnings in this organization. During my freshman year of high school, like many

others, I was struggling to find my place. Everybody has a group where he or she fits or belongs, but I couldn't seem to find mine. I was an athlete, but I wasn't setting any records. I was in choir, but my voice cracked every time that I tried to hit a high note. Every niche that I tried to fill just didn't seem right, until I had my first interaction with a state officer.

At the Adams, Franklin, and York county leadership conference of my freshman year, I watched the state officers mingle and interact with others as well as myself. In their conversations, they created connections and gave members an opportunity to let their passions shine. In the words of my middle school science teacher, Mr. Jones, "everybody is a nerd about something." The state officers

allowed members to be nerds and developed meaningful conversations about things that they loved. This was different than the other surface-level experiences that I had in and around high school. For the first time, I began to find a place where I fit and where I was welcomed.

Because of this experience, I found my "why." I wanted to give back to this association and its members the same thing that it gave to me, a sense of belonging. In times of struggle and heartache, I found more than just a club, I found a family. Throughout my year of service, it's my goal help our members find their sense of belonging in our organization because at the end of the day, everyone has a seat at the table of agriculture.

15 Ways to Volunteer in 29 Days

BEV FLATT

National FFA Association

One of the most important questions FFA alumni and supporters can ask is, "How can I help?" In the spring semester, particularly in February, advisors and members can be so overwhelmed they might not know how to respond. Whether you are crafty, organized, well-connected or handy, there is a chance that your skills can be put to use to help your local chapter through this busy season.

- Paint or print posters for FFA Week

activities.

- Take photos for members working on their SAE projects for great proficiency award applications.
- Make up quiz flash cards to help members study for different career development events.
- Volunteer to take a weekend shift watering plants in the school greenhouse.
- Proofread resumes, essays and letters of recommendation.
- Cook (or cater) breakfast for teachers and members one morning during FFA Week.

- Offer to dry-clean, lint roll or shine shoes for members' official dress to make sure everyone is dressed in their best.
- Spend an afternoon in the agriculture mechanics lab sharpening blades, vacuuming saw dust and organizing parts drawers.
- Take a stroll through a store to grab spare white button-down shirts, black socks and blue ties to keep in the classroom.
- Offer to teach a lesson or act as a substitute teacher on days when there are events during school hours.
- Help FFA members connect with the

local radio station and newspaper to advocate for agriculture during FFA Week.

- Get your hands dirty and help chapters prepare their garden beds for spring planting.
- February can lead to a lot of late nights. A fresh-cooked dinner or restaurant gift card can go a long way.
- Writer's block can be an issue this time of year. Help an FFA member brainstorm different ways to tell their story in applications.
- Pound the pavement to seek donations from local businesses for the second semester.