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Sharing FFA Stories Fosters Passion to Do More

FROM THE OFFICERS STATION

What does it mean to be a state officer? For me to be a state officer means a lot of different things. For one, a love, passion and dedication for agriculture. Agriculture has affected me my entire life.

Since I was little, I was involved in 4-H — that's where it all started for me. To look back and see the little things that sparked an

interest, I am always amazed. After six years of trying my hand in 4-H, I got involved in my school's FFA chapter, which started another love, passion and dedication, but not only for agriculture. Agriculture played a huge role in it, but it came with so much more. During my five years as a Meyersdale FFA member I wanted to experience more and bigger things that FFA had to offer, which meant running for state office.

After months of preparation, it happened. To this day I am still in awe that I get to serve as a state officer along side my six amazing teammates.



McKENZIE GLASS

I thought going into the year I was just going to tell my story and hopefully impact those who heard it; little did I know that was not the case. It was me hearing the stories of others and me being impacted personally. Hearing these amazing stories, none of them will ever sound the same. Everyone has a story to tell and I will be all ears

to hear them. To be a state officer to me means being someone to hear the things that inspired and developed the next and fabulous generation of our agriculturists. To be a cheerleader for any and every FFA member when needed. I feel this is a quality that you can't obtain in any other organization.

Being a state officer for the Pennsylvania FFA association gives me the ability to use that quality every single time I encounter an FFA member who wants to share the story that led them to this one-of-a-kind-organization.

McKenzie Glass is the Pennsylvania FFA Chaplain.

5 Ways to Serve While Social Distancing

JESSICA WALKER BOEHM
National FFA Organization

Although many things have been put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, carrying on the FFA Living to Serve mission is still very possible — and more important than ever.

"Our youth can play a big role in making things better right now, and those who are healthy and able to volunteer have plenty of opportunities to get involved," says Stefanie Sebastian, senior service engagement specialist for the National FFA Organization. "No effort is too small; it all counts."

Read on for a list of ways you can give back to your community, whether on your own or with your chapter, while continuing to practice social-distancing protocols or sheltering in place.

Support Homebound Community Members

Consider delivering groceries, prepared meals or supplies to those who are at a higher risk of developing severe complications from contracting COVID-19, including those over the age of 65 and people with underlying medical conditions. Additionally, you can walk and feed their animals, pick up and deliver their mail, and complete outdoor tasks like yard work.

Educate the Younger Population

Since kids are home from school and likely completing their assignments online, it's the perfect opportunity to host virtual tutoring sessions. You can also record yourself read-

ing a children's book. Share it with parents or post the recording to your social media channels.

Sew and Write to Show Your Appreciation

Those working in the health care, law enforcement and service industries need masks for protection. Consider sewing a few and donating them to local agencies. If sewing isn't for you, write thank-you cards for medical professionals, police officers and grocery store employees — or anyone whose work you appreciate.

Put Your Ag Skills Into Action

Now is the perfect time to plant a garden and donate your harvest to those in need, whether directly or through an organization in your community. Another idea: Create an outdoor scavenger hunt of native species in your area and post it to social media, giving kids and adults an incentive to get outside and learn more about plants.

Partner With Local Organizations

Feeling overwhelmed? Reach out to a group in your community — places of worship, food banks and nonprofit organizations, for example — and see if there's an opportunity to contribute to one of its existing or future efforts.

That's not all. You can find more ways to serve and participate in the Living to Serve Chapter Challenge, which is now also open to individuals. Log your service hours, share your stories and inspire others to take action.

Staying in Contact

Through all the mayhem of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is easy to lose sight. As a state association, it is our job to be there for the members all year long, no matter what. So, throughout the next few months, we are trying to stay in contact with all of the members. Living in the 21st century, one of the easiest ways to do this is through social media.

Pennsylvania FFA is one of many social media sites and state officers have now decided to take over those accounts. Every other day a different state officer takes over our main platforms, which include Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Each officer is doing something a little bit different. It could range from talking on a live video and having members and the public ask questions, to even little at-home cooking shows. All of this is to continue to stay in contact with our members.

This time can now also be a little bit glum. So, we also try to be able to brighten up the lives of those who follow our FFA media. As a state association, we post different videos of the state officers having fun in the quarantine of their own homes. We host different online events as

well, such as a movie night so everyone can feel together in the safety of their homes. One of our main goals is to be able to not lose our members within all this mess.

One line of the FFA motto that is very impactful is the line that reads, "Living to serve." FFA members embody that by participating in multiple acts of community service. When forced to be apart, we do not just forget our FFA values. One way that we are participating in community service is through a website called www.freerice.com. On this site, students and teachers sign in with a special code that puts them into our Pennsylvania FFA group. Once added, they then answer basic trivia questions, and with every answer they get correct, 10 grains of rice are donated to those in need. It is run through a non-profit organization that helps people all over the globe. It also gives our members a way to make their mark together. Feel free to follow us on any of our social media to be able to keep up with all the new and exciting things that we will be doing throughout the next few months.

Conference Canceled Due to COVID-19 Concerns

National FFA Organization

For the first time in 50 years, the National FFA Organization's Washington Leadership Conference won't occur this summer.

The organization made the decision this week due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. "We have an obligation to protect the safety and health of our FFA members at our events," said Christine White, National FFA chief program officer. "In addition to the health and safety of our members, there were other logistical issues as well — such as extended stay-at-home orders, large group restrictions and venue closures in the Washington, D.C., area that led to this decision."

All who registered for WLC will receive full refunds — including deposits. Those participants who canceled earlier, due to concerns of COVID-19, will also receive a refund on their deposits.

The curriculum of WLC is based on four tenets: Me, We, Do and Serve. Building upon each of these four tenets leads the students to the overall objective of the conference, which is becoming an engaged citizen who can make a measurable positive difference in their community.

"Washington, D.C., was utilized as a living classroom for this conference where museums and important sites were embedded in the curriculum. While we can't replicate the WLC experience virtually, we are developing other ways to engage students virtually during the summer months," White said. "We know our members are tomorrow's future leaders and want to provide them with resources to help them through this uncertain time."

The organization plans for WLC to return in the summer of 2021.

The Strength of an FFA Member

THOMAS STRONG
State Reporter

Adversity. A word that is not new to any of us in the agriculture industry and one that most of us live with every day, which some have come to terms with. However, this one word can strike much pain and fear into the hearts of many.

It is the way in which you deal with that adversity that truly defines who you are as a person. Whether you let it beat you down and win, or whether you rise to the challenge and meet adversity head-on.

As we deal with the affects of the COVID-19 virus, much is being taken away from our students. It may be their teenage freedom. It may be the friends that they no longer get to see every day at school. For some it is even the chance to walk across the stage at graduation. No matter what you have had taken away, everyone has had something stripped from them in the light of this pandemic. As we have all of this taken from us it is easy to be able to feel defeated, or to give up on the life we knew as a whole.

This is surely not the first time our FFA members have run into adversity. In 1942, as the U.S. entered World War II, the national FFA convention was held with 217 members. However, in 1941 there were over 6,000 members in attendance. A drop in attendance was caused by the rise of enlistment rates and from the decrease in available funds and transportation. There are many similarities that can be drawn between

this moment in history and the time that we are currently living in.

The first similarity would be that not too long ago this all just seemed so foreign. Only a month and a half ago we watched on our televisions as this disease devastated other parts of the world like our nation did in the '40s as other countries waged war against each other. Both of these times some people did not care to think of how it was just moments away from reaching us in our safe country. The panic and the outrage grew back then just as it does today. Where people didn't know what to do to be able to support the way of life that they have come to live in.

Now, what we are going through doesn't exactly compare to the millions of lives lost all over the world during World War II. Right now, though, is an important time in history, and something that will be written about in textbooks as a way to define this era. As FFA members and members of the agriculture industry, this isn't the first time that we have faced adversity head on. It most certainly will also not be the last.

The determination of an FFA member is strong. The mind of an FFA member is strong. We must power on as an association of nearly 13,000 members and as a national organization of over 700,000 members. It is only then when history will see the true strength of an FFA member as we make our mark.