



Lancaster Farming Salute to FFA



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Two New Jersey FFA Powerhouse High Schools Share Secrets

DAN SULLIVAN

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FFA has been preparing students for careers in agriculture since the first National FFA Convention was held in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1928. Back then, 33 delegates from 18 states attended. Today there are FFA chapters in all 50 states, as well as the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Two high schools in New Jersey excel at minting state FFA officers: Northern Burlington County Regional High School in Mansfield Township and Salem County Career and Technical High School in Woodstown.

"I've been teaching at the school for 11 years," said Keely DiTizio, who teaches agriculture courses at Salem Tech. "There hasn't been a year yet where we haven't had a student on the state executive board for New Jersey FFA."

That may partly be because students don't want to mess up a success streak, she joked, but it's more likely a result of the award-winning teacher's infectious enthusiasm and passion for FFA.

Graduating from Cape May County Technical High School with



Salem Tech FFA

Students participate in Salem Tech's FFA Spring Service Day in 2022, cleaning up 2 miles of beachfront in Elsinboro and collecting truckloads of trash.

a certificate in ornamental horticulture, DiTizio said she herself was inspired by a teacher to pursue leadership through FFA. Now she's paying it forward.

"I served two years on the state level as a representative for, at the time, probably about 2,000 members," DiTizio said. "Now, in New Jersey, it's probably closer to 2,500 FFA students. They're agriculture

students, but they're also in the (FFA) youth organization."

Enrolling at nearby Stockton University, DiTizio was on track to become a wildlife biologist when she underwent a change of heart her senior year.

"I worked for the Cape May Whale Watcher ... and I also worked for the Wetlands Institute over the summer as an educa-

tion intern," she said. "And that's really where I decided to become a teacher."

DiTizio graduated in May 2012 and by August had been approved to be an agriculture teacher.

She made the perfect choice, she said.

"I think just having passion for what you do is really important," DiTizio said. "And I think because

I love my job so much, I think that just sort of emanates and people want to be a part of it."

They also want to be empowered, she said.

"I try to be like 'the guide on the side' and not so much like an authoritative figure that's demanding things," DiTizio said of her teaching style. "So I kind of give them the ability to take the leadership role and challenge them to create their own solutions."

That sort of cooperative autonomy carries over into the mechanics of FFA itself, she said.

"What's really cool about the FFA organization is that it very much operates like traditional politics in terms of voting and representation," DiTizio said. "So the students are the constituents and they shape the organization, which allows for all that leadership development and really allowing them to take the organization where they want."

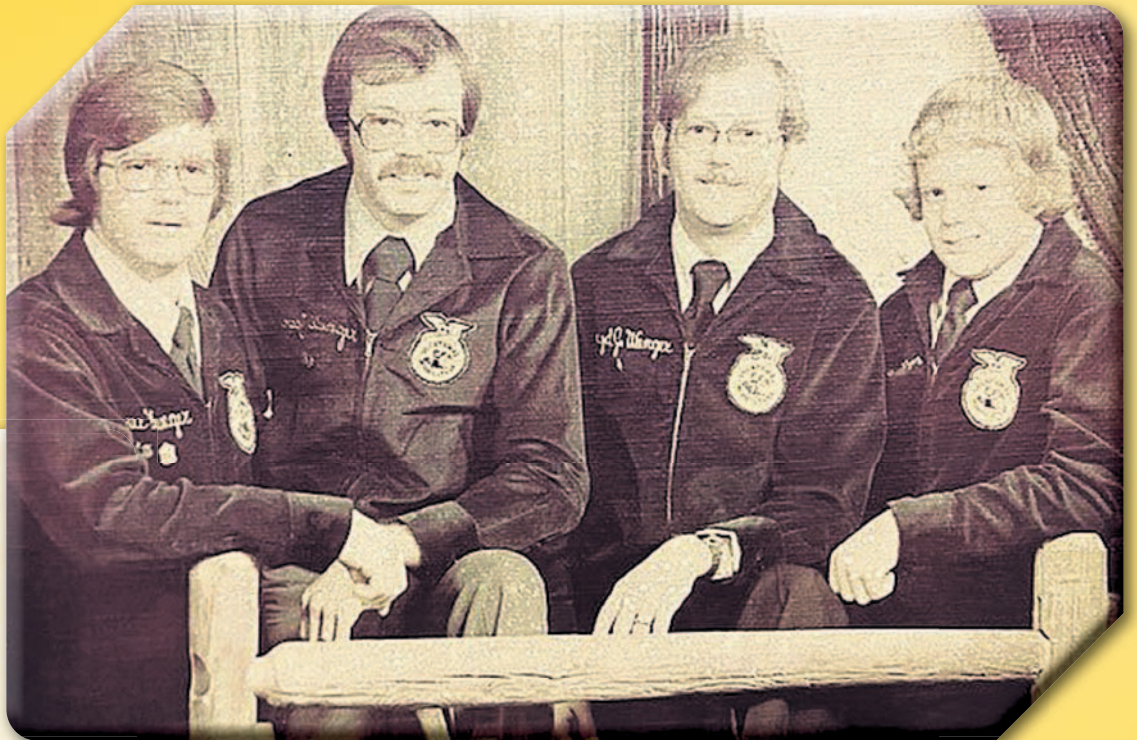
It's a continual passing of the torch.

"It's been 15 years since I wore the jacket," DiTizio said. "These kids are different, and they have

More **SECRETS** page D6

We at Wengers of Myerstown are honored to celebrate the over 13,000 FFA members, advisors and educators during FFA Week in Pennsylvania. The values of the FFA organization and our business are very much aligned. In our business, we employ a multitude of prior FFA members and we appreciate the leadership, knowledge and skills they bring to their employment.

The Wenger Family has a long history of involvement with the FFA including three generations of state officers (Carl Wenger 1951-1952) (Glenn Wenger 1981-1982) and (Molly Dubble 2009-2010); three regional Star Agribusinessman, several American Farmer Degree and several Keystone Degree recipients.



We at The Wenger Foundation believe in the future of agriculture and we were pleased to be able to support the purchase of the new van that will be used by the Pennsylvania State Officer Team as they travel and promote agriculture and education in our state and beyond.



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Where Are They Now?

Past State FFA President Shares Her Experiences

MELISSA HARROP
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Lily Guthrie knows how transformative being a Pennsylvania FFA state officer can be. Her experience led to a job with the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau.

Lily served as state FFA president for the 2015-16 officer year. She is an alumni of the West Perry FFA chapter.

She summarized her journey through FFA with one word — growth.

“I joined FFA as a shy freshman member who was unsure of herself and what she wanted for her future,” Lily said. “Through participation in CDEs, leadership conferences and chapter events, I gained experiences and skills that shaped me into who I am today.”

As a state officer, Lily met members from all over the commonwealth, something she never imagined she would experience.

“If you would have told me as a freshman that I would eventually become the state FFA president, I would have thought you were crazy. But when it came time to run for state office, I was confident and prepared,” she said.

Lily cites her time spent as a member and officer as leading her to where she is today.

“My experiences in FFA gave me the skills and confidence to flourish in my current position with the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau. The first time I visited with a legislator was as an FFA member attending the State Legislative Leadership Conference,” Lily said. “Now, legislative visits are part of my weekly routine, and I look back on my first experience with fondness, knowing that FFA equipped me for the role I play now.”

Lily wants all young members across the state to know how far they can go.

“If I could impart one piece of wisdom to someone just starting their FFA experience, I would tell them their FFA journey is what they make it. I would encourage them to attend every event and take every opportunity presented to them because you never know where it may lead,” she said.



Submitted by Lily Guthrie

The 2015-2016 Pennsylvania FFA state officer team is a fond memory for then-president Lily Guthrie. From left, Luke Kerstetter, Beth Winklosky, Lily Guthrie, Tyler Watkins, Katie Sharrer, Rachel Greig and Jonathon Noss during the National FFA Convention.

“Go to conferences, meet new people and participate in the contests that make you most uncomfortable. It’ll pay dividends and you’ll be shocked at how much you grow.”

But the biggest takeaway for Lily is the memories made in FFA.

“My favorite memory of being a state officer would be traveling across Pennsylvania with my teammates,” said Lily. “Whether we were headed to a chapter visit or a county fair, the hours we spent in the car together were some of the funniest, most memorable moments of the year.”



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Secrets

Continued from D1

different thoughts, and they want to run things differently."

Brian Hayes teaches greenhouse landscaping and ag mechanics, and is one of four FFA advisers at Northern Burlington High School. He said that while FFA rightly has its roots in farming and agriculture, the program that recently produced four of six New Jersey state FFA officers in one year focuses on developing a broad skill set.

"We really try to work with the students and develop their leadership qualities, that they are all good public speakers, that they have the ability to write a resumé, and they have some actual practical work experience," he said.

Northern Burlington has a proud legacy of turning out state FFA officers dating back to the 1960s, Hayes said. Among the school's recent products, Jamie Specca made the shortlist to be a national FFA officer in 2020.

Many of Northern Burlington's state officers pursued education careers and are now ag teachers throughout the state.

"I went to a very small high school, and they had an agriculture education program," Hayes said. "So I joined FFA, and when I was younger it was always trying to beat Northern Burlington."

When the opportunity to teach there presented itself, he jumped on it.

"We've kind of taken it from a two- or three-teacher program now to where we've got four teachers at the high school, and we have one at our middle school. So every student really gets to experience agriculture in some capacity," he said.

More **SECRETS** page D7



Northern Burlington FFA

Valentine's Day flower bouquets created by Northern Burlington floral design students. From left, Marguerite Winzinger, Anika Patel, Keely Hall, Caitlyn Miller and Anna Van Mater.



Salem Tech Chapter FFA President Megan Brooks instructs middle-school students during a vegetable and fruit career development event. Three FFA officers performed the workshop, which included educational games at Upper Pittsgrove Middle School.



Salem Tech FFA members load up food left over from their community breakfast into a vehicle waiting to deliver it to a local church food pantry.



Northern Burlington advanced plant science students benefit from a state-of-the-art, 5,500-square-foot greenhouse on the high school campus.

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Secrets
Continued from D6

The school also benefits from idyllic infrastructure, thanks to a 2018 referendum allowing for major renovation, said agriscience department leader Nan Hamilton, a Rutgers University animal science graduate who has worked at Northern Burlington for 23 years.

"We have a brand-new (5,500-square-foot) greenhouse, state of the art, we have an ag mechanics shop that contains two classrooms and the shop area, and we also have an animal science classroom," she said. "And we do have animals. We have too many horses, and a bunch of other critters running around. And there's a floral design room that I utilize for floral design."



Northern Burlington animal science class students horse around with Mini, one of many animals on the high school campus.



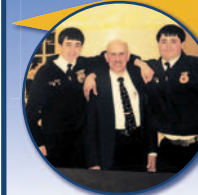

"Over the years, the colors in your jacket may fade, but the value of your time dedicated to FFA never will."

GRANGE



A new agriscience facility was recently made possible through a referendum allowing for major renovation at Northern Burlington County Regional High School. The project included a 5,500-square-foot greenhouse, a floral design room, an ag mechanic shop and classrooms, an animal science classroom and plenty of room for farm animals.

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Guy Naugle
Ag Teacher & FFA Advisor
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Winklosky Family Builds FFA Officer Tradition

JASON GUARENTE

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By the time it was James Winklosky's turn, being part of FFA felt inevitable. He even had a T-shirt to prove it.

"Future state officer," it read. James wore the shirt when big brother Steve, who's eight years older, was FFA vice president in 2013-14. James hoped to continue the family legacy.

"I thought it was the coolest thing that my brother was up on stage doing conventions and stuff," James said. "I wanted to be him. That was one of my driving motivations. Watching him get elected."

The T-shirt was prescient. James is serving as president today and is the fifth Winklosky to be an FFA officer.

It started with Paul, the father, and continued with each of his four children. Paul was the western vice president in 1981-82.

The Winkloskys own a small pig farm in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. They typically keep five to eight sows to breed for show.

The officer tradition among the children started organically. Paul talked about his positive experiences in FFA, and his children

saw all the connections he made through the program.

Steve took the first step, and it continued with Beth, treasurer in 2015-16, Phil, reporter in 2017-18, and now James.

For each of them, it was a fun way to stay connected to ag.

"I saw it as the next step of my journey," said Steve, who now works in construction. "There was so much opportunity in it. You got to meet a ton of new people. That was always my thing. I liked the whole social atmosphere, learning more about it and being part of something."

FFA teaches life lessons and can turn a fear into a strength. Steve said the program helped him overcome a speech impediment. He stuttered and was afraid of public speaking until he was asked to read the creed.

"Pushing out of my comfort zone to get past that was a big thing," Steve said. "Once I got through that my freshman year, everything was a walk in the park. I realized it wasn't as hard as everyone makes it sound. I actually learned to really enjoy talking in front of crowds."

Beth was next in line. Being the only female among the children didn't change her

experience. In the Winklosky family, everyone tackled every chore and activity.

Some days the boys baked cookies with their mom, Gretchen, while Beth hauled manure or fixed something in the barn.

"We don't know life without agriculture as a basis," Beth said. "FFA is the perk that came with it. Our dad would mention it and show us. There was never any pressure. It was all of our own free will."

Beth went to Penn State and hopes to become an ag teacher. She's working as a building substitute in Derry Area School District and is expecting her first child in three months.

Once James' term ends, the Winklosky FFA contribution will be on pause, but Beth's family lives on a dairy farm. Her future daughter could someday continue the chain.

"I'm going to show her the opportunities and tell her how great my journey was," Beth said. "If she latches onto that, that will be amazing. If she doesn't, it'll be OK."

One of the unwritten family rules was that the siblings weren't allowed to help each other in their pursuit of office. Some advice was permitted. Coaching was not. Each student

was on their own.

Phil found his career through FFA. He works as an agronomist at Sterman Masser Potato Farms in Schuylkill County. When Phil was an officer, Sterman was one of the places he toured.

"I saw the community that there was in agriculture and the friendships that were able to be made," Phil said. "You always felt like you belonged anywhere you went. You belonged to the group."

James, who wants to attend Penn College and study diesel mechanics, was the first member of the family to become president, a fact he playfully mentions to his older brothers and sister.

"Mom and Dad had to stop with me," he said. "They knew it couldn't get any greater."

James said the FFA experience has been everything he imagined when walking around in that T-shirt so many years ago. He understands the responsibility he took on with this position.

"Being in state office, you really have to want to do it," James said. "You're gone sometimes for a month at a time. You're always traveling. It makes you realize how big everything is."



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