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Pennsylvania FFA Happenings

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Submitted photo
Pennsylvania FFA show their awards at the Big Eastern States Exposition in Springfield, Massachusetts, in the fall.

The Celebrations of Members to Continue in 2020

THOMAS STRONG
State Reporter

2019 has been full of milestones and memories for Pennsylvania FFA. Our state convention and activities week at Penn State had close to 1, 200 students compete and present to see who would represent Pennsylvania at national convention and the Big E exposition later in the fall. One of the very last things that was done at our convention was the election of our 2019-2020 Pennsylvania FFA state officers.

Moving forward through the summertime, school would started to begin in August and our chapters began their new school year ready for whatever would come.

In September, Pennsylvania FFA celebrated its 90 anniversary. Back in September 1929, a state charter application including the names of our first 10 chapters and 165 members was submitted to the Future Farmers of America. Flash forward 90 years and now Pennsylvania FFA is made up of 148 chapters and just shy of 13,000 members statewide as part of the National FFA Organization. In September, Pennsylvania FFA sent our second-place state FFA winners to the Big E in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Before the national convention in October, the National FFA also had an anniversary to celebrate. Fifty years ago, women were allowed into the FFA. Girls being allowed membership into this organization is one of the best things has ever happened in our FFA

history. This grew our membership tremendously and in 50 short years girls now are 50% of our total membership and fill over 50% of our state and national leadership roles. All of which has brought great diversity and so much good change to our organization.

The National FFA Convention and Expo in Indianapolis, Indiana, with nearly 70,000 people in attendance was held in October and November. Pennsylvania had a great showing with 98 students who competed in 27 events over the span of the week. National Convention also showed us all who would be serving as our National FFA Officers for the next year.

We kick off the new year with our Mid-Winter Convention on Jan. 6 at the Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, during 2020 Pennsylvania Farm Show. Once again students will compete in many competitions to showcase their skills. Our association will give out Keystone FFA Degrees, the highest that can be earned at the state level for a member. All these students have worked incredibly hard over their high school careers to embody the values of FFA. Also, our Pennsylvania FFA Alumni Association will sponsor our first-year jacket program. The alumni plan to give out around 365 jackets to new members.

Overall 2019 has brought great opportunities for our students and chapters. I'm looking forward to a successful 2020 for all of our members and chapters.



File photo by Philip Gruber
First-year members put their jackets on for the first time during the January Mid-Winter Convention.

OFFICERS CORNER

Having a Heart For Others

BRANDON BIXLER
State Vice-President

Reflecting on the past six months of my time as Pennsylvania FFA vice-president, numerous different thoughts and feelings come to mind. My time spent as an FFA state officer has taught me more than I could have possibly hoped for, both about the agriculture industry and the people in it.

I am beginning to understand just exactly what this year of service means to me and the many ways it has shaped and will continue to shape my life.

My state office aspirations began near the end of my freshman year of high school.

For the first time, I saw state officers in action at the State Convention, held at Penn State University. I had a passion for leadership, and I quickly came to view the state officers I saw on stage as role models and heroes. My passion was only further ignited as my ag teachers encouraged me to pursue this dream.

For the next three years, I did just that. Perhaps no date has held greater importance or been more anticipated in my life than June 13. The culmination of years of hard work and support from those who mattered most in my life came down to one day and one announcement. When my name was called along with my six teammates, I knew that I was in for the ride of a lifetime.

As state officers, our schedules are varied, which provides no shortage of opportunities for meaningful new experiences. Perhaps nothing excites me more than chapter visits, in which my teammates and I travel across the state and visit FFA members in high schools in all corners of Pennsylvania. From east to west and north to south, one thing remains the same — and that is the passion for agriculture and living to serve our world. There are many challenges facing our world, but as I spend many days with FFA members across the state, I am confident our future is bright.

When I think of all that goes into Pennsylvania FFA, the phrase “it takes a village” comes to mind. As the saying implies, our state association could not stand on its own without the support of valuable industry partners. As someone



Submitted photo
“I had a passion for leadership and I quickly came to view the state officers I saw on stage as role models and heroes,” Bixler said.

who does not come from a production agriculture background, I am consistently impressed with the impact of the agriculture industry on almost every facet of our daily lives.

Whether it's farming potatoes, financing agricultural loans, or developing precision agriculture software, our industry is home to the most dedicated and driven people around. I've learned that sometimes the only way we can truly appreciate something is to experience it first hand, and this year has helped me develop that appreciation for both the agriculture industry and those who make it up.

Over the past few months, I have learned an important truth: No matter the situation, what truly matters is the people we are — not the things we have done. When talking about the people we are, I could not think of a better group of people — a village — to be a part of. Nearing the halfway point of this year of service, I have recognized the good in having a heart for others.

This new generation is ready to be tomorrow's leaders, ag educators who are working to build our future, and an industry that works tirelessly and selflessly to power our world. We have everything we need. Thank you, Pennsylvania FFA, for being the village that has made this year a dream come true.

