



BLUE AND GOLD

Pennsylvania FFA Happenings

INITIATE, CREATE, ILLUMINATE

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FFA Draws ‘ACES’ to Harrisburg

TAYLOR HALBLEIB
Pa. State FFA Secretary

Each February the Pennsylvania FFA Association hosts its largest conference of the year. Agriculture Cooperation Establishes Success, or ACES, is a two-day conference held over the first three weekends of the month. Approximately 1,500 students and advisers attend the event series. Both students and advisers enjoy leadership workshops, guest speakers and the making of lifelong memories during their time at the Sheraton Hotel in Harrisburg.

Throughout the first day of the conference, students rotate through five workshops. The topics of the workshops were agriculture literacy, FFA opportunity, and respecting diversity and were taught by the current state officer team — Nathan Moyer, Thomas Gabel, Taylor Halbleib, Philip Winklosky, Brody Coolidge, Justin Kurtz, and Kelsey Stewart, as well as past state officers Jill Palmer, Tyler Watkins, Libby Baker-Mikesell, Elizabeth Win-



FFA members huddle up for a workshop exercise.

klosky, Maddy Buss, Jacob Kline, and Matthew Brake.

In addition, two workshops were taught by AgChoice Farm Credit and Pennsylvania Farm Bureau on financial skills and life after FFA. In the evening, Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding, Deputy Secretary Gregory Hostetter, and Deputy Secretary Fred Strathmeyer and Emily Thorpe with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation shared a few words with the students during dinner. In the morning, the students completed a community service project plan before departure.

This year, the conference theme was Creating the Vision. While planning ACES, this year’s Pennsylvania FFA state officers wanted the members in attendance to take what they learned at the conference and use it to build their own “vision” of life inside and outside of FFA. By attending ACES, the members are able to apply what they learned at school and in their everyday interactions.

Changing Lives, One Member at a Time

FROM THE OFFICERS STATION

Simply put, FFA changes lives. Hello Pennsylvania FFA, my name is Thomas Gabel and I am serving as the Pennsylvania FFA state vice president. And looking back now, I just have to marvel at the impact that being a part of this organization can have.



THOMAS GABEL

Truth be told, as I entered high school as a freshman, I did not want to be an FFA member. I was put in an odd situation. My sister was heavily involved with Newport’s FFA Chapter, serving two years as chapter president and graduated as valedictorian of her class. As I entered high school, I felt this immense pressure that I had to be just like my sister and was worried about my peers and teachers’ expectations for me in the classroom. I figured that if I became involved in FFA I would be met with the same wave of overwhelming expectations.

Fortunately, I was blessed to have Mrs. Natalie Barkley as my adviser, and she would not take no for an answer until I actually tested the waters. Mrs. Barkley convinced me to sign up for two events, the creed-speaking contest, and my first ACES conference. I attribute my love for public speaking to that five paragraph creed, but my love for this great organization stemmed from ACES. Walking into the Sheraton Hotel, I had no idea what to expect. What I found amazed me. Every person I met welcomed me with open arms, and from there on I was hooked. During every step of the conference, whether it be workshops, dinner, the dance, reflections, or the Sunday morn-

ing program, I found myself hearing from and meeting individuals that would have a lasting impact on me. This organization truly is inclusive, and as I have interacted with members from all across the state, I have discovered that everyone has a story, you just have to listen and let them tell it.

Being able to interact with members at chapter visits and conferences over the past eight months has filled my heart with happiness. I could not be more amazed with how unique each chapter is and how open each one of them is as us officers become part of their chapter for the duration of our time with them. I consider myself incredibly blessed to say that I have almost 13,000 friends from all across this great commonwealth. Seeing their passion for agriculture and how they continue to grow and succeed through agricultural education is truly awe inspiring. This interaction with students has cemented my future career path into a concrete plan.

Next year I will be attending Penn State, University Park, majoring in agricultural and Extension education with a minor in political science. Life is all about “living to serve,” and I hope to serve through a high school classroom in my future. I hope to initiate potential, create opportunities and illuminate the accomplishments of my future students, just as my adviser and FFA has helped me to do.

Editor’s note: Thomas Gabel is the Pa. FFA vice president.

Sharing the FFA Story in the Sunshine State

In late January, state officers Thomas Gabel and Justin Kurtz were on their way to Orlando, Florida, for the New Holland North America Dealer Meeting.

At a roundtable discussion with the nearly 1,000 people in attendance, Gabel and Kurtz had the chance meet New Holland dealers all over the country, representing young agriculturists and FFA members.

To open up the discussion, both officers gave opening remarks on their subjects. Gabel spoke on how to bridge the gap between young people and New Holland after Kurtz spoke on how to get more young people into production agriculture. Once finished with remarks, they took audience questions from a text delivery system. Questions included “How do we use new technology in agriculture?” and “How to get FFA members excited about the variety of careers in agriculture?”



Thomas Gabel addresses New Holland dealers at a meeting in Florida.

Afterward, they spoke with New Holland North America Vice President Brett Lieberman and dealers from around the country. One dealer later said “You (Justin and Thomas) excited an old man to get back in the community.”

Gabel said the conference “was

a unique experience since everyone was there to learn and interact with each other to better themselves and catch up with people they haven’t seen in a while” and “it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to interact with nearly 1,000 people all at once.”

Kutztown FFA Celebrates 75 Years of Agriculture

Over the past 75 years, Kutztown has worked diligently to provide its many members with leadership opportunities, agricultural education classes, and individual learning during their time at Kutztown High School. This is accomplished through agriculture classes, supervised agriculture experiences, and other FFA opportunities. The first step in a student’s success in this organization is becoming a FFA member.

The Kutztown FFA was founded on Nov. 17, 1942. The founding officers were President Kenneth Nuse, Vice President Nello

Kunkel, Secretary Stanley Kern, Treasurer Donald Siegfried, Watch Dog (Sentinel) Lee Breidigam and Adviser Paul C. Dunkelberger. The officers for the 2017-18 school year are President Zach Schell, Vice President Nathan Raudenbush, Secretary Jaquelin Cartier, Treasurer Thea LaMastra, Historian Megan Dieter, and Reporter Ethan Saner. The founding chapter had 35 charter members. Today, Kutztown has 62 members participating in all sorts of programming.

Kutztown FFA is planning a 75th anniversary bash for former FFA members to celebrate this milestone, starting at 6:30 p.m. on

Feb. 24 at the Virginville Grange Hall, 456 Main St., Virginville. A family style meal will be served at 6:30 p.m., followed by the night’s activities. Tickets can be purchased for \$16 for adults, \$8 for children 5 to 10 years old, and children under 5 are free.

Tickets can be purchased by stopping by the Kutztown High School Ag Department or by making a check out to Kutztown Area School District, with FFA on the memo line, and mailing it to Kutztown FFA, 50 Trexler Ave., Kutztown, PA 19530.

For more information, call 610-683-7346, extension 7435.