

1998 Iowa Master Farm Homemakers Guild Inductees

Ruth Beck - IMFH Class of 1998

Tama County

Picture a warm, Thursday afternoon in mid-July. You're headed to the mall in Waterloo, when you spot a busy farmer's market in the parking lot. As you venture closer, your eye catches something bright at one of the vendors' tables. Then you notice neatly stacked baked goods--many varieties of lightly-browned breads; tall, fluffy rolls, big cookies and perfect pies, all carefully packaged and tied with a piece of red yam.

Behind the table is a petite, silver-haired lady who chats with customers as she hands out samples of cabbage slaw accompanied by the recipe.

"I loved the broccoli salad you had a couple weeks ago," comments one passerby, her arms laden with bread. "I'm making it for a wedding shower this weekend."

Ruth Beck spends her days preparing for markets. From mid-May through October, she and her husband, Don, sell their goods at as many as six markets in one week. They have a diversified farm operation near Buckingham in Blackhawk County. In addition to producing corn, soybeans and hogs, they offer fruits from their orchards, vegetables from their gardens, baked goods and a wide variety of tasty homemade jams and jellies. Ruth uses a commercial kitchen built on to her home in 1995 to produce the full line of baked goods and preserves.

Ruth stays busy in the "off" months, too. She has a custom baking business and sells frozen cookie dough, which groups use for fund-raisers. In one year, Ruth sold 13 1/2 tons of cookie dough!

It would seem that the above endeavors would be enough, but Ruth has other responsibilities as well. She served on the board of the National Cattle Congress for 15 years and was superintendent of the home arts department. She has also been involved in 4-H activities for over 34 years. Ruth was a leader for 18 years before turning the club over to Don when the boys and girls club were merged. They worked together as leaders before handing the reins to their son, Louis, and his wife, Pat, last year. She still presents workshops, judges at the fair and evaluates record books.

Church is important to the Becks. Ruth collaborates with a friend to decorate St. Mary's Church each Sunday, and helped design the kitchen for the new church.

"Ruth's talents and energy are unlimited, but what makes her special is her personality and character," writes Mary TeWinkel, Iowa State University Extension specialist in Waterloo. "She is willing to take risks and try new challenges, and does it all with humor and enthusiasm."

More than likely, Ruth developed her sense of humor while raising seven children. Ruth and Don are foster parents and have welcomed troubled adolescents into their home. They have hosted hundreds of guests from throughout the world and many school groups have come to the farm.

Education is a high priority in the Beck home. All of the children graduated from college, pursuing a wide variety of interests. But they took time to play, too. A cabin at Lake Delhi provided hours of fun while the family was younger and they still try to come home to gather several times during the summer.

Music filled the household while the family was young as each of the Beck children learned to play. Even now, tinkling the ivories of the grand piano in the living room is a relaxing endeavor for Ruth.

As each of their children start households of their own. Ruth and Don present the gift of a piano if they don't already have one. This priceless tribute continues as the grandchildren advance in their piano studies.

Family members are: Dan, marketing director for Wholesale Feeds, Marion: Louis, ag science instructor for Union Schools, La Porte City and his wife, Pat; Mary Ann Beck Wagner, family program coordinator, YMCA Des Moines, and her husband, Bob; Wayne, commercial lending officer, The Rock Island Bank, Rock Island, Illinois; Alan, printing software engineer, Apple Computer, Inc., Cupertino, California; Sara Beck Hendrzak, health care case management, Sykesville, Maryland; and Lowell, ag sales representative, American Cyanamid, McAllen, Texas. There are 13 grandchildren, ages four to 16.

Things have not always been easy, but the focus never veered from the future. There were college students in the family for 14 consecutive years and during this period. Don's medical condition required two different kidney transplants. To supplement the income, Ruth returned to her career in the histology department at the local hospital. But, as a plaque on the wall in Ruth's kitchen says, "When God closes a door, he opens a window." Her faith, family and friends are constant sources of strength and support, and Ruth provides the same to them.

Naomi Christensen - IMFH Class of 1998

Mills County

Volunteerism and service to community is a way of life for Naomi Christensen of Malvern in Mills County. She sees a job that needs to be done and doesn't hesitate to lend a helping hand.

Naomi and her husband, Bob, have a grain and livestock farm which is co-owned with their son, Doug, and his wife, Lynn. Doug and his family now live at the home farm with their sons, Seth, Bryce and Gregg. Their daughter, Donna Christensen-Mores, is human resources director of the Shelby County Health System in Harlan. She and her husband, Alan, have two children, Jackson and Chandler.

Purebred Simmental beef cattle are a key part of the farm operation. Bob has been secretary of the board of directors of the American Simmental Association since 1970 and Naomi works behind the scenes with the paperwork. She also helped organize the junior association and assists with the large Simmental sale at the Iowa Beef Expo.

Young people are important to Naomi and she has been a 4-H leader for 27 years, receiving numerous awards along the way. Her influence on young people is remarkable.

"Naomi was the type of youth leader who made things fun," writes Harva Paul, a former 4-Her under Naomi. "As I look back I realize the incredible amount of organization and preparation it took."

"In 4-H, I remember her coming to my house when record books were due and helping me complete it, coaching me on the fair demonstrations and hosting countless 'camp-outs' on her front porch. She always expected us to do our best and then supported us so we could."

Harva's own children are beginning to benefit from Naomi's talents. They have attended summer mission studies through the church, led by Naomi and Bob.

One cannot begin to list the church-related positions Naomi has held. She and Bob are active members of the Strahan United Methodist Church. This small, yet vital, church

has benefited greatly from the support of the Christensens. Naomi is actively involved with the children of the church by doing the children's sermons on Sunday and by doing mission studies so they understand that helping others outside the local church and community is an integral part of the Christian faith.

Naomi has always been active in the United Methodist's Women's (UMW) organization. Her strong beliefs on the rights of women are a positive influence not only on the organization but the entire church. She helps others become more aware and active in promoting women's rights for equality and justice.

One of Naomi's greatest accomplishments was her participation in the General Board of Global Ministries for the church. She was an advocate for peace, justice and equality through missions. She traveled around the country and abroad sharing her faith and love for others.

"The global ministry was a wonderful experience," says Naomi. She still serves on a national board of the United Methodist Church, but now she's focused on county government.

Naomi continues her influence as a member of the Mills County Board of Supervisors, where she works to improve conditions for those who live and work in the area.

"I thought it was time we had a woman elected" she jokes.

Never one to shirk hard work, the supervisors meet twice a week and she relates to 24 committees every month. As always, women and children are a top priority for this energetic lady. She works with the child abuse council, the four-county battered women's shelter board and the tri-county coalition for families board, to name a few.

Naomi supports organizing a mentoring program and gives time and leadership to the Hometown Health Project, This is a community-based health planning model.

The county is changing from a rural to urban community. Naomi is trying to plan for responsible growth. "In 1996 and 1997, we had 32 new housing developments," she says. "We're working on more ordinances to stay ahead of the growth."

Although Naomi has been active outside the home, her top priority is her family. She took time to be a homemaker, work on the family farm with the husband and raise a family. Her attitude in stressful situations is inspiring.

"Naomi wants everyone to have opportunities to reach her or his potential," says Kathryn Burt, Master Farm Homemaker and member of the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women with Naomi. "To accomplish this, she gives unselfishly of herself to family, church, community, state and world.

Sydney Vogel - IMFH Class of 1998

Taylor County

Charming, effervescent and gracious are a few adjectives which accurately describe Sydney Vogel from Blockton in Taylor County. Her husband, Jon, gives her an even more fitting tribute: "A great mother, devoted wife and friend, talented teacher and community supporter."

The Vogel farm has been in the family for five generations and antiques abound. Sydney can point to a beautiful wooden rocking horse that once belonged to Jon's great grandmother and bring out the wooden box with tubes of china paint used 70 years ago. She appreciates the chance to share stories and preserve keepsakes for generations to come.

Sydney wasn't raised on a farm. She grew up in Poplar Bluff, Missouri, where her father was a news editor on the paper that had long been in her mother's family. Instead of going into the family business, as so many of her relatives did, she married her high school sweetheart. They spent two years in Germany during Jon's army tour in 1962-64, then returned to his family's farm.

Sydney's contributions to the farm included operating machinery and helping with the cow-calf operation. She also cooked dinners for the "hired men," ran errands, delivered messages, shared with Jon the plans for the operation and accepted inconveniences with humor.

Music is an important facet of Sydney's life. She started playing piano when she was three years old and never stopped. She was a piano major at the University of Missouri and continues to share her gift with the community.

Sydney was a music teacher in the Bedford school system for 12 years. Later, she filled vacancies as needed. She has taught, participated in and directed countless musical endeavors in the community.

She also provides piano instruction for area youth. She takes a personal interest in her students and skillfully makes learning a joy through her enthusiasm for music.

"Teaching at home is the best of both worlds," she notes.

Sydney plays piano and organ in the United Christian-Presbyterian Church every Sunday. Her contributions are not limited to music, however. She is also moderator of the church's board of deacons.

Nancy Ross, church pastor, says Sydney is an outstanding caregiver. "She works hard at meeting the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of her parish members. To be a caregiver is a special gift and Sydney has it," continues Nancy.

"Platteville" is a high priority for Sydney. It might not mean much to the average visitor, but at one time it was a thriving village near the Vogel home. The population was in the hundreds, although today it's officially "6."

This resourceful lady is preserving the town's heritage. She has studied its history and contributed to the history book published in 1988.

Sydney and Jon have also spent countless hours maintaining and restoring the cemetery. Her last project is a photo album showing the work in planting a long row of Austrian pines, and the installation of the new white fences. Jon's relatives are buried there and the Vogel's have done a great deal to maintain the lovely setting.

Family, in the broad sense, is important to both Sydney and Jon. They have opened their home to visitors from many countries. A Laotian family was living in a refugee camp before the town sponsored them to move to the area. Jon and Sydney were some of the first to welcome them and they helped tutor the five children. The family lived there for two years, but then moved to California. Their daughter, Kim, chose to stay in Bedford to finish school. She lived with the Vogels and still maintains close ties with the family.

"You always get back so much more that you give," believes Sydney. Sydney and Jon help others appreciate cultural diversity and understanding. By opening their home they showed their own children the world had no boundaries. Their oldest daughter, Julia Vogel Potwin is a speech pathologist in Yuma, Ariz., where she lives with her husband, Bert.

Son Jim is a consultant in health care administration who lives in Denver, Colorado, with his wife, Janet. Sarah Vogel Thomas is a certified florist and floral design instructor. She and her husband, T.J., live in Arvada, Colorado.

"We tried to provide our children with opportunities so they could make choices," she explains. "The price of those opportunities might mean that they live far away, but if they're happy, what more could you ask? That's what makes them grow and makes them want to come home."

Mary Ellen Wall - IMFH Class of 1998

Johnson County

Mary Ellen Wall, from Iowa City, has many interests, but none so great as her dedication to young people. She has been a 4-H leader and innovator for 23 years and her influence on the youth of Johnson County is far-reaching.

The 4-H program is a big part of Mary Ellen's life. She and her siblings (five sisters and one brother) were in 4-H as youngsters and all through school. A trip to the National Club Congress to represent Iowa as the state clothing winner was one of the highlights of her young life.

Mary Ellen has expanded her international knowledge and exposure a great deal since then. She and her husband, John, have hosted numerous farm tours for people from around the world.

They have also opened their home and diversified livestock operation to delegates for the International Agricultural Safety Conference, members of the Iowa City Chamber of Commerce, area school teachers, preschool children and other community groups.

John and Mary Ellen even appeared on the "Kenny Rogers America" television special, which was filmed at the Wall farm in 1980.

As exciting as that experience was, Mary Ellen prefers to let others take the spotlight, while she works behind the scenes. She keeps all of the farm records and is the resource person in tax and estate planning for the operation.

This active farm woman has held offices in the Johnson County Porkettes and served on the state pork producers committees. She was chairman of the Iowa Pork Queen committee and judged numerous queen contests herself.

When her children were young, Mary Ellen was a room mother, chaperone for trips, chairman of the school carnival and helped with sports events.

The state Extension and home economics advisory committee benefited from Mary Ellen's input and she has judged record books at county, area and state meetings.

"One of the great assets of volunteering are the friends we have throughout the state and nation. You gain more than you give," she adds quietly.

Genealogy is a hobby of Mary Ellen's, and she has done extensive work in compiling family histories. During the process, the Walls discovered that they might be distantly related-their relatives are from the same county in Ireland. Every year, the couple goes to an event that raises money for young men from Ireland-both Catholic and Protestant-to come to the United States. They learn to live peacefully here, explains John, so hopefully they'll go back to Ireland and live peacefully.

Church is another high priority for the Walls. They were members of St. Bridget's Church,

established in 1859 and closed in 1996. Mary Ellen is assembling a history of the church and the families that were members. She and John were part of a group that raised \$60,000 to endow the cemetery so the church would not be razed. They continue to raise money for future upkeep of the church.

Mary Ellen helped bring about changes in 4-H when her club, the Graham Champions, opened home economics to boys and livestock to girls.

Mary Ellen is the organizational leader of the 56-member club, and focuses her attention on educational presentations and developing junior leaders. Every member is required to give a presentation at the club level and winners advance to the county level. She enjoys seeing how each young person grows and develops from their first attempts. Their own daughter, Mary, was "scared to death" to give presentations, but with each one it got easier. She attended the National Club Congress as a winner in consumer education, advancing as a national winner. Now, she is head of sports information at the University of Florida. She lives in Gainesville, Florida, with her husband, Steve.

Son, Tom, also excelled in 4-H, attending National Club Congress as state beef winner. After graduating from Iowa State University, Tom returned to the farm and is in partnership with John. He followed in his parents' footsteps when he became a livestock leader for the club in 1981.

Tom and his wife, Anita, have three children: Rachel, Greg, and Sarah. This is Rachel's first year in 4-H, and Greg and Sarah are anxious to participate, too. Look for the tradition to continue, under the watchful eye of Grandma Mary Ellen and Grandpa John.