

2004 Iowa Master Farm Homemakers Guild Inductees

The Iowa Master Farm Homemaker award has been sponsored by Wallace Farmer since 1940. The honor recognizes these women for their fine work with their families, homes and community service.

Since the program was started in 1928, the Iowa chapter has had a total of 300 members, four honorary members, and belongs to a national organization made up of award winners from many states.

The Iowa chapter's membership has increased to 304 with the addition of this year's four new winners of the award. We salute Norma Lyon, Caryl Smith, Sandy Teig and Virginia White. They are people with the common vision to better themselves and those around them.

In their communities, they take on thankless tasks because they know what needs to be done. They stay late to help paint the church, run for the school board, teach Sunday school or work behind the scenes in community organizations. But foremost they are farmers who are devoted to their families.

The judges for this year's awards were: Jeanne Warning, assistant director to families for Iowa State University Extension Service; Rita Ann Venner, president of Iowa Master Farm Homemakers Guild; and Frank Holdmeyer, executive editor, Farm Progress Companies.

Current officers of the Master farm Homemakers Guild are: Rita Ann Venner of Breda, president; Nita Taggart of Clarinda, vice president; Lavonne Peters of Bellevue, secretary; Margaret Ledger of Washington, treasurer; and Joan Moore of Alden, historian.

Caryl Leopold Smith - IMFH Class of 2004

Washington County

She's a niece of Aldo Leopold, the father of natural resource conservation in this country. The apple didn't fall far from the tree. With a land ethic ingrained in her genes, Caryl Leopold Smith has been farming Springtown Ranch for 42 years. It's a unique farm overlooking the Skunk River valley north of Brighton in southeast Iowa.

Caryl and her late husband, Burnett "Barney" Smith at one time had a herd of 300 beef cows. She helped Barney put up 20,000 small square bales each year. Today, there are 70 cows and she helps take care of them. The bales are the big round kind, which she handles with a tractor.

Son Nelson and his wife, Jacklyn, live down the road and farm with Caryl. The 1,000-acre farm has 450 tillable acres; the rest is pasture, hay, timber and wetlands. Barney died eight years ago and is buried on a high hill in a meadow, with a sweeping view of the farmstead and picturesque valley below. A split-rail fence surrounds the burial spot. A sign on the gate says "Barney Park." Caryl visits regularly and keeps it mowed. Standing sentinel, a U.S. flag flies from a pole.

The Smiths have always been great caretakers of the land. They started with 400 acres, adding to it over the years as adjoining parcels came up for sale. Besides cattle, they raised Morgan horses. "At one time we had 29 horses," says Caryl. "I told Barney we had more horses than we had brains. He didn't think that was funny."

At the time Barney passed away, organic farming was gaining popularity. Caryl and Nelson wanted to devote some acres to organic farming. She decided to raise organic soybeans, corn, oats and hay in rotation. "We don't get the grain yields conventional

farmers do," she acknowledges. "But our price is better and we avoid the high cost of purchased inputs. If you manage it right, you can make money farming organically."

The farm, including the cow-calf operation, is 100% certified organic. "It takes more labor," says Jacklyn, "but being organic adds value to what we produce and conserves resources. Organic is not going to work for every farmer or farm, but it's working for us."

Daughter-in-law Jacklyn knows her stuff. She has an off-farm job as an organic inspector, doing inspections for the Iowa Department of Agriculture and other certification agencies. "Someone else inspects our farm, not me," she explains.

Caryl serves as assistant Washington District commissioner and is on the Washington County Conservation Board. Some of her ground is in the Wetland Reserve, Conservation Reserve (CRP) and Riparian Buffer Strips programs.

Caryl has personally helped plant over 5,000 trees on CRP acres and riparian buffer strips. Caryl and Barney raised four sons; all attended college. Active in 4-H, the family welcomed many foreign exchange students into the home. Caryl still introduces guests to farming and family life in the Midwest.

Active in the county historical society and the Altar and Rosary Society at St. Joseph's Church, Caryl has served on many committees. A volunteer for years at Polishville Community Center, she still logs hours feeding community members of all ages, including people from local nursing homes who are transported to luncheons and bingo.

"I find in her a strong faith in God, devotion for family, friends and continued education," says Rev. Charles Fladung, her pastor. "Caryl has a consistent enthusiasm and hospitality. We are all blessed to have her as a neighbor. She brings out the best in you."

Caryl deserves the Master Farm Homemaker award, says her neighbors, farmers Dan and Barb Mottet. "Caryl's years of service to the community, dedication to conservation and her ability as a good farmer are remarkable," says Dan.

Norma "Duffy" Lyon - IMFH Class of 2004
Tama County

Most people know Norma "Duffy" Lyon as the "butter-cow lady." Since 1960 she has sculpted the famous cow at the Iowa State Fair. But at home near Toledo in east-central Iowa, people appreciate Duffy and her husband, Joe, for their years of involvement in 4-H, school board, dairy association work, church... the list goes on and on.

"Norma Lyon is a farm homemaker who has reached out to share special talents," says Ann Smith, Iowa State University's Extension education director in Tama County. "The family has been in 4-H for three generations. The Lyons and 4-H dairy projects are synonymous. She's taught many 4-H'ers how to prepare foods using dairy products. At the state level, Norma served on the Iowa 4-H Foundation Board."

Duffy's sculptures represent the dairy industry and rural life. Each year she sculpts a life-size cow of one of the six major dairy breeds. She also adds a new work to the glass display case in the State Fair's Ag Building. This year's exhibit is a Jersey cow, a barn and a huge birthday cake to mark the fair's 150th anniversary.

The young people who assist her glow with pride when they tell about their part in helping. People stand in lines to view her work.

"Butter is wonderful to work with, whether you're sculpting or baking," says Duffy.

As a sophomore in animal science at Iowa State in 1948, Duffy's interest in art led her to start taking classes from ISU's renowned sculptor Christian Petersen. Duffy also met G. "Joe" Lyon at ISU. They graduated, married and she ended up on the Lyon family farm at Toledo, helping Joe milk Jerseys.

The Lyons have been Jersey breeders for over 50 years. Joe and Duffy farmed in partnership with Joe's brother, Howard and his family. The Lyons were awarded the Iowa Master Farmer Award in 1983. Howard died in 1989. Joe, his son Eric and Howard's son Stuart continue as partners today.

Stuart looks after the crops on the 1,500-acre operation, Eric and Joe manage the dairy. Currently milking 275 cows, they have a total of 800 head of cattle, mostly Jerseys. "We have some beef cattle, young dairy stock and we keep bulls. Our bulls are in demand," says Duffy.

"All these cattle eat a lot of hay. Seems like we're always bailing. We buy some hay, too."

"We have six employees, full and part time, in addition to our family," says Joe. "Our intern this summer was Sarah Mullen, an ISU dairy science student. Economic development people like to see dairy farms in Iowa. We hire help and buy a lot of inputs."

Son Eric and his family live across the road. The grandparents appreciate their helpful grandchildren. "Joe would rather milk cows that mow the lawn," notes Duffy.

The Lyons are active in the Iowa Barn Foundation, helping preserve Iowa's rural heritage. Duffy and Joe are mainstays at St. Patrick's Church where she taught religious education, was a song leader and took communion to shut-ins for many years.

Duffy was on the Iowa veterinary review board. Joe served on the Farm Credit Advisory Board, Swiss Valley Farms Dairy co-op board and is active in Midwest Dairy Association. Joe and Duffy this summer received the Iowa State Fair's first-ever Outstanding Lifetime Accomplishment Award, honoring the fair's 150th anniversary.

Somehow Joe and Duffy found time to have nine children and raise them well. They were in music and other school activities, all were 4-H members, all are college graduates.

"We've tried to be good members of our community," says Duffy. "If we saw something that needed doing, we tried to help."

Sandy Teig - IMFH Class of 2004

Hamilton County

Sandy Teig and her husband Russ worked side-by-side in a 1,000-acre grain operation near Jewell in Hamilton County. In addition, Russ was a representative in the Iowa Legislature.

While Russ spent most of January through April in Des Moines, Sandy remained at home to care for their two small children, keep the farm running smoothly and grow her own marketing and management business. Life was good.

However, in February 2002, Russ suffered a near-fatal stroke. He was hospitalized in Des Moines for six weeks and in therapy for another six weeks. Sandy was by his side the entire time except for time spent with their children.

For a long time, Sandy didn't know how permanently disabled Russ would be-or if he would even live.

Spring planting was fast approaching. Plus, they were about half finished with a major remodeling project on their small home overlooking Little Wall Lake. Decisions had to be made, and Sandy had to make them.

"Until that point, I'd just been a 'slave' in the farming operation," quips Sandy. "But, after Russ's stroke, I worked with his father, Tilford, for at least a year. Tilford and I made the necessary decisions and did the labor with the help of friends and family. Now, Russ is back at the helm of the ship. He has always been the brains behind this farm's success, and we're glad to have him back in the game."

Russ continues to show improvement each day but still has difficulty walking. Throughout it all, Sandy has maintained her positive attitude and continued to help other people as well. "Like all families dealing with life challenges, everyone has to adjust accordingly. We adopted the attitude 'whatever it takes' and just kept moving forward one day at a time," she says.

A former rural program director for the Iowa Department of agriculture, Sandy started her own business in 1999. Teig and Associates helps people achieve financial independence by earning income outside of their regular jobs.

"The goal, in many cases," explains Sandy, "is to make it financially possible for the mother to stay home with the children."

Teig and Associates works with a number of large companies to market more than 1 million products, says the energetic entrepreneur.

With all the responsibilities of the farm and her business, Sandy still finds time to visit the sick, prepare meals for elderly friends, direct Bible study and even support the troops in the Middle East.

As a former 4-H & Youth Extension Director for Hamilton and Wright Counties, Sandy enjoys staying involved with youth by judging 4-H and other contests. She looks forward to additional involvement when her children, Amanda and Nicholas, are old enough to join 4-H.

Sandy is the choir director at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Stanhope, a member of the local women's Philanthropic Educational Organization, active in the Hamilton/Wright Counties Women's Republicans and is a member of the Farm Bureau Speaker's Bureau.

Sandy led a local effort organized by her church to "adopt" 10 soldiers stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan. The group writes regular letters to soldiers and sends things that are in short supply, such as batteries, sports magazines, etc. She works with the Stanhope Locker to ship beef jerky to the troops as well.

Perhaps Liz Pehl summed it up best when she wrote: "Sandy is one pint-sized woman who can pack a big punch and work circles around most people."

Virginia White - IMFH Class of 2004

Marshall County

Fifty-four years ago Ralph "Red" White "stole" the county Farm Bureau office assistant and they began life together on the farm.

Four days after Virginia and Ralph were married, he unexpectedly announced he was bringing an additional four or five men home for lunch. Virginia wasn't used to cooking

big meals, but undaunted, and with a little help from her mother-in-law, she "made it through that day."

She's been "cooking up a storm" ever since, making visitors feel welcome with scrumptious dinners, desserts and snacks.

"I love to cook," she declares. But baking is her favorite activity-working with yeast dough, especially pie crust. One of her favorite activities is taking baked goods to new mothers, shut-ins and others. She organizes dinners and bake sales to raise money for various activities.

Virginia's activities and interests-past and present-extend far beyond the kitchen, however. Virginia and Ralph are retired but when they were actively farming, Virginia was the bookkeeper, gardener and tractor driver. "I spent a lot of time on the tractor when planting and harvesting the crop," she notes.

A tour around their yard indicates Virginia (Ginny) still has the green thumb. Flowers of a multitude of colors surround the new home they built near Melbourne in Marshall County in 1999.

Virginia suffered a stroke a few years ago. Knowing how much she loved gardening, Ralph built a raised garden bed to make it more comfortable to tend her vegetables. Her love of books and writing poetry has also helped sustain her through the rough times.

Exercise is an important part of her recovery so she and Ralph take daily walks-often up to a mile-around the grass airstrips on their farm. "Ralph is a pilot," she explains. "He keeps the runway mowed and it's quite therapeutic to walk with corn and beans on both sides of it."

Both were 4-H leaders. Active in Farm Bureau, Virginia was county women's chair, District 5 women's chair and served six years on the state Farm Bureau women's committee. She is currently county safety chairman and county Kid's Sake chairman. She has spent time at the state legislature lobbying for Farm Bureau policies, particularly ethanol.

She is a 50-year member of Eastern Star, and has held almost all of the offices in her P.E.O. chapter since her initiation in 1970, held leadership roles in United Methodist Women and is now chaplain of the American Legion Auxiliary.

The mother of three children and grandmother to seven, Virginia was named an Iowa Merit Mother in 1990.

At their church, the New Horizons Methodist Church in Melbourne, she was a Sunday school teacher, active on numerous committees and still sings in the choir.

The Whites raised cattle until a storm destroyed their building in the early 1980s. During that time Virginia was a member of the Cow Belles.

Ralph and Virginia continue to enjoy being around people and have more time to do that now that they are retired. On Saturday mornings they spend an hour or so visiting with senior citizens in Melbourne. Ralph and Virginia belong to a 50-plus (age) group that meets regularly.