

2005 Iowa Master Farm Homemakers Guild Inductees

Seventy-seven years ago, five Iowa farm women represented the thousands among their ranks as the first Iowa Master Farm Homemakers. They were recognized for homemaking skills, maternal traits, farm contributions and involvement in rural and community organizations. They represented the highest values in rural life. Even with all the changes in agriculture between then and now, the Iowa Master Farm Homemakers still epitomize those same high values.

The national program was initiated in 1928 by *The Farmer's Wife*, a magazine published in St. Paul, Minn. F.W. Beckman, editor, and Bess Rowe, women's editor, were the creators of the award, which was carried out with the cooperation of the Extension Service.

Today, the program continues, even though the world has changed dramatically. Nothing shows that change more distinctly than the worksheets early nominees were asked to fill out. They were 48 pages long and included questions like: "Do you have a water system in your home? If not, how far must water be carried and who carries it?"

It's difficult to fathom the type of work these women performed on a daily basis, but reading some of the earlier articles on the winners provides a glimpse into their lives. The story on the 1928 winners appeared in *Wallaces Farmer* in February of the same year. It noted: "Mrs. J.O. Smith of Marshall County lives on a 320-acre farm, rented for the present, while they are paying for their own farm. The house she lives in is not modern, but she arranged it as conveniently as she can. She uses gasoline power to wash within a wash house. Her favorite time and labor savers are a sink and drain board, and a cistern pump, also a bread mixer.

President Teddy Roosevelt's Country Life Communion report stirred new interest and concern for rural life in America. Roosevelt saw a widening gap between urban and rural living, and he wanted to assure the same conveniences for those on the farm as city dwellers enjoyed.

During the association's annual meeting in Ames in 1929, the National Master Farm Homemakers Guild was organized. At the same time, the Iowa State Guild, with 10 members, was organized. The next year, the Iowa Guild named a committee to draw up a constitution, set dues at \$2 and adopted a project, "The Study of Library Facilities for Rural People in Iowa."

Hard times were to put a strain on the guild, however, especially after *The Farmer's Wife* ceased to function in 1931. During the Depression, dues were lowered to 50 cents and no new members were selected. In 1936, each member agreed to buy a book to be sent "round-robin" to all members.

By 1938, the State Guild was thinking of ways to continue recognitions, and a committee was appointed to confer with the Extension Service with regard to future programs. The discussions continued until 1940, when they called on the editor of *Wallaces Farmer*, asking that the magazine sponsor the organization in Iowa, which the editor agreed to do.

Zoe Murphy was in charge of the project for the magazine.

Then the war years ensued. Time and transportation were hard to come by, so no meetings were held from 1943-45. The first recognition of new members sponsored by *Wallaces Farmer* was in 1947, at which time the worksheet was revised, the constitution was updated and dues were raised to \$2.

The Iowa Master Farm Homemakers Guild has always contributed to worthy projects, both nationally and internationally. The Red Cross, UNESCO, Pennies for Friendship, Nutrition/Save Sight, Water for All and numerous other projects have been funded by the guild.

Of special note is support of the Ruth B. Sayre Scholarship fund, created in 1978. Sayre was one of the early leaders in Iowa. She served as president of the National Master Farm Homemakers in 1930 and was later elected as international president of the ACWW, serving from 1947 to 1953. She also was a member of the Eisenhower cabinet.

Sayre encouraged women to "let out the seams of their thinking" and to "developed international minds" until she eventually became the most influential farm women in the world.

Through the 1950s, '60s and '70s, the IMFH guild thrived. Earlier members remained active throughout their lives, and new members enjoyed working with like-minded, ambitious women. The camaraderie among these rural leaders was infectious, and many good deeds were accomplished.

Each learned from the other, as farm life changed, Rural electrification had a major impact on farm life as did the telephone and improved transportation. More changes occurred in the 1980s and 90s. Farms became larger and more specialized, and many more women began to provide off-farm income.

"The roles of farm women have changed in the last 40 years from partner/financial dependent to partner/ financial supporter, and in the last 20 years to partner/ co-financial supporter," says Leah Maass, who was a 2002 Iowa Master Farm Homemaker.

"After reading Ruth Buxton Sayre's biography and my grandfather's history of the farm I grew up on, it became even more apparent that women have always been and still are the backbone of the business of farming," she continues.

The production side of farming has been enhanced by mechanization and the science and technology of crop and livestock production, notes Maass. Still, the one constant in agriculture throughout all of history is "feast or famine."

There have been 305 Iowa Master Farm Homemakers, along with four honorary members. As Maass points out, "No longer is the 'farmwife' fighting loneliness on the vast prairie; she is fighting the encroachment of urbanization onto the life-sustaining tilth that represents generations of struggles, successes, failures and continuity."

Although challenges continue to create uncertainty, farm women, as represented in the Iowa Master Farm Homemakers Guild, will do what it takes to survive and thrive.

The Iowa Master Farm Homemaker award has been sponsored by Wallace Farmer since 1940. The prestigious honor recognizes 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 304 members and 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 308 with the addition of this year's four new winners of the award. We salute Virginia Fredericks, Beverly Glienke, Angie Omduff and Margaret Phillips. They are people with the common vision to better themselves and those around them.

In their communities, these women have taken 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 guild are; Venner, Vara Groot of Manson, vice president; Leah Maass of Ellsworth, secretary; Margaret Ledger of Washington, treasurer; and Jean Moore of Alden, historian.

Margaret Phillips - IMFH Class of 2005

Van Buren County

Margaret Phillips is known for cooking-and not just for the turkey dressing that's so popular for family dinners at her and husband Marvin's farm in southeast Iowa. Margaret is also known for her tireless cooking for her community.

If you've suffered the loss of a loved one, Margaret is there for you. Or if you just got married, she's likely to be the one organizing the food, too.

Volunteer cooking is part of the reason Sandra McLain, education director of the Van Buren County Extension, calls Margaret the "volunteer angel." McLain sees firsthand the impact Margaret makes, and how many of the community functions would not be possible without her.

"I am aware of the lack of financial resources in Van Buren County. Our residents do not have the financial means to support activities if people like Margaret Phillips would not willingly donate their time and talents. She is the service organization glue, with her endless volunteer hours," McLain says.

Margaret chairs a six-member funeral meals committee in the Douds Methodist Church. She also organizes meals for the Pork Producers; she's been on their board for 25 years. She's organized meals, some of them for wedding receptions, for as many as 350 people.

"Many young couples have noted that Margaret and her experience saved an embarrassing wedding reception moment, when she pulled off another miracle," McLain says.

Margaret also "does everything but plant and combine" on the farm. Her favorite fieldwork is unloading haylage and silage, and cultivating. "She can operate any tractor better than any hired person," says Marvin. The two grow about 1,300 acres of corn and soybeans, and feed cattle from a 100 head cow herd. When Marvin was elected a county supervisor in 2003, it was Margaret who picked up the extra farm duties.

She likes the farm work, but her favorite pastime is working in the flower bed, Margaret says. "After working in the field, it's relaxing."

In days past, when their four daughters were young, Margaret was a 4-H and Girl Scout leader. She has also been active in Eastern Star and served as a trustee for the church in Douds.

The girls now have families of their own, including five grandchildren. They're close as a family, but not all live close to their grandmother. "Some of them call me 'Grandma in the sky' because they have only come here on a plane," Margaret says with a smile.

She has spent her own share of time on a plane and on cruise ships, having traveled to Russia, London, and Panama Canal, Alaska, Guatemala, Copenhagen, and to other world destinations with Marvin.

An avid bowler, Margaret and her "Golden Girls" teammates go on the road to compete. After returning from a national tournament in Tulsa, Margaret said laughing, "We go to get away from our husbands."

Margaret is looking forward to two treats in the near future: an all-family cruise to Alaska and a new house on the farm. And, yes, that new house is going to have a big kitchen!

Angie Ornduff - IMFH Class of 2005

Washington County

On call 24-7, Angie Ornduff's volunteer efforts go well-above and beyond those of an average farm homemaker. She and her husband, Ron, have responded night and day to everything from heart attacks to car accidents to train wrecks as volunteers for the First Responders unit of the Ainsworth Fire Department.

State certified, she has a pager and a scanner, and can get to the ambulance in seven minutes from her house.

"Sometimes it can be traumatic," Angie says, "but most people are very thankful and you usually don't know the people involved, so that helps." Angie has been a volunteer for the First Responders since its inception in 1981.

Angie's volunteer efforts in other areas go back a long way, too. Angie has been an elder in the Ainsworth Community Church for 18 years and has been a Sunday school teacher there for 25 years. She's currently on the membership committee. In addition, she is a member of the Ainsworth Community Church Women and is responsible for the funeral dinners at the church. Angie stepped down in January of this year from the Washington County Conservation Board after 20 years, the past five as chairman. Of all her worthwhile efforts there, Angie is most proud of the role she played in building a new conservation center. Completed two years ago, the building now hosts hundreds of schoolchildren for conservation and environmental studies. Angie helped with planning and fund-raising and continues to volunteer her time there. "Two feasibility studies said we couldn't raise the money we needed, but we did it," Angie says.

Angie has been involved in 4-H since she was 9 years old. Her mother was a 4-H leader, and she followed to become a leader for 12 years when her own daughter was a member.

After graduation from college, Angie taught home economics for three years. She began judging local achievement shows and county fairs in 1959 and has judged home improvement projects at the Iowa State Fair since 1981. Even though she is the one judging, it's a two-way street for Angie. "I love working with the 4-H kids," she says. "I'm always learning something new from them."

Angie and Ron have three children and six grandchildren, which account for much of their time these days. Angie loves to cook and read, but also likes to be outside. She feeds finches, chickadees, nuthatches and other birds in her backyard. Angie also knows her way around a tractor and talks fondly of her time in the cab of a John Deere tractor hauling grain on their 390-acre farm in eastern Iowa. She did the farm books when she and Ron farmed actively. Now they live in Ainsworth and rent their nearby farm to their son.

Beverly Glienke - IMFH Class of 2005

Cherokee County

Beverly Glienke and husband Ernie are natural promoters of agriculture. Living on one of the few dairy farms in Cherokee County, the couple is often called on to give tours of their farm. Beverly eagerly hosts each group with open arms and delicious "farm" food.

In 2003, the Aurelia couple served as the agricultural stop for Sen. Chuck Grassley's Foreign Ambassador Tour. "Down the gravel road came four highway patrol cars and three great big buses carrying people from 62 countries," she says. "I'll never forget the whole experience.

"The couple gave a tour of their farm to the ambassadors and answered their questions. Beverly served an afternoon snack consisting of nine different kinds of homemade cookies, cheese curds, ice cream and milk.

In 2004, the Storm Lake Rotary Club asked the Glienkes to host 11 Russians who were interested in visiting an American dairy farm. The couple agreed and gave the group a farm tour, complete with a barbeque-style lunch.

The couple also annually hosts pre-school kids from their church. St. John's Lutheran. "We give them a little tour and then some ice cream-and most of the little kids are very delighted," she laughs.

Beverly notes that when her 10 grandchildren were in kindergarten, she used to visit the class and teach the kids about the dairy farm using a video and book. Now that all of her grandkids are through kindergarten, her daughter-in-law and two grandchildren continue the tradition. "They even haul a cow to the school," she says.

Beverly has also played instrumental roles in both Farm Bureau and 4-H. She served as the Farm Bureau Cherokee County Women's leader for four years and District Three Women's leader on the State Farm Bureau Women's Committee for four years. She was also on the Cherokee County Fair Board for eight years and served as a 4-H leader for nine years.

"Beverly has known agriculture forever," says Marian Johnson, Cherokee County Farm Bureau Women. "She and Ernie raised four children and taught them the importance of responsibility in agriculture and dairying."

In March, Beverly and Ernie retired from farming. They sold their 100 dairy cows and rented their land to their sons, Brian and Keith. Ernie now works for the boys.

Despite the change of hands, Beverly jokes that she still has not seen much change since retirement. "The only thing I've noticed is that we don't get the milk check, or the vet or food bill anymore," she says.

All three sons are currently involved in production agriculture and the grandkids are frequent workers at the farm. "What greater statement of a master homemaker than a family farm legacy carried on to the next generation?" asks Lois Morris, Beverly's daughter.

Besides promoting the livelihood of farming, Beverly has been active in her church for 46 years and part-time secretary for 21 years. Ernie and Beverly are members of Gideon and Beverly belongs to the Auxiliary. They also attend Bible study classes.

Virginia Fredericks - IMFH Class of 2005

Hardin County

Since she was a youngster, Virginia Fredericks of Iowa Falls has been curious. As a 10-year-old, Virginia's curiosity led her to sew garments for her younger siblings and sketch pictures of the country landscape. Nearly 70 years later, her curiosities have grown to encompass numerous artistic, historical and community activities.

"Virginia has many talents and she has willingly shared them with the folks in Franklin County," says Beverly Peters, Franklin County Extension Education director. "Her work and volunteer time have touched both young and old residents and visitors."

Virginia's most prolific role in the community has been as a member of the Franklin County Historical Society. In 1976, she joined the society and served as president for eight years and director for 12 years. Virginia played an instrumental role in the construction of the society's museum complex in Hampton, which has grown to include an entire village and farm.

We can't count the hours she has given us as an officer, board member and museum curator, says Franklin County Historical Society member James Jorgensen Jr. "It is because of her leadership that the Franklin County Museum has been so successful."

Virginia also plays an active role in church. She has served as a Sunday school teacher at the Iowa Falls Baptist Church since a year before her marriage to her husband, Dick, in 1948. "When my three children were small, I taught in the nursery, but now I have graduated up to teaching the adults," she laughs.

As the couple's children grew up, Virginia took on various service leadership roles. Daughter Jeannette joined the Girl Scouts, so Virginia served as a leader for 15 years. She was also a 4-H leader for 15 years even though her daughter was not a member.

"I really enjoyed working with the girls and training them," she says. Virginia has also been a member of the Isabella Literary Society, Questers, Parchment Club and the Iowa Falls Baptist Church women's group. She has served in leadership positions in nearly all of the organizations.

Yet, Virginia's dedication to her activities can only be matched by her devotion to her family and the farm. She served as Dick's "right-hand" man on their 400-acre row-crop farm in Iowa and 420-acre wheat and milo farm in Kansas until they retired and rented out their farm ground about five years ago. "I guess we were 'suitcase farmers' back then," she smiles.

Virginia also kept the records for the farm and Iowa Falls Tool Co., a business Dick began as a teenager that constructed lathe mandrels. Dick ran the business until he was forced to retire four years ago.

In the midst of retirement, Virginia says she is busier than ever taking care of Dick, who broke his hip in May, and baby-sitting for grandsons Nathan and Andrew nearly every day.