

2009 Iowa Master Farm Homemakers Guild Inductees

Judy Leistikow - IMFH Class of 2009

Bremer County

Judith and Ron Leistikow are retired dairy and beef producers. They milked side by side for 38 years on their family farm, as many as 100 cows at a time. Judy maintained all production, health and DHIA records. Today, they operate 1,400 acres of corn and soybean near Readlyn in Bremer County. Ron and Judy were named Iowa Master Farmers in 2003.

Even though semi-retired, Judy still maintains all records for their personal cash-crop business as well as for a 3,500-acre farm partnership, which includes sons Kevin and Kurt and son-in-law Marty Marticoff.

She also manages payroll and employee records as well as coordinates many of the meetings involving banks, the Farm Service Agency, crop and tax consultants, etc. She is Ron's partner when it comes to marketing the crop, and they make decisions together on land rental, selling prices, government program operations, etc.

In addition to recordkeeping and marketing, Judy is the glue that holds it all together. She cooks and delivers "meals on wheels" to her husband and family during planting and harvest. If a part is needed, she runs to get it and delivers it to the field.

Cooking is one of her many passions. She can often be found reading recipe books and loves to cook for family and friends, often trying out new recipes.

Gardening is another passion. Judy has flowers of all kinds around the yard and many are designed to attract birds and butterflies. With Ron's help, she grows a large garden and cans hundreds of quarts of salsa, green beans and cucumbers.

Above all is family, however. It's rare to find a family of six children, six in-laws and 20 grandchildren who can all get together as often as they do. The whole group tries to get together at least twice a year—at least once in summer for a family weekend and once in winter to celebrate Christmas. In 2007, Ron and Judy took the entire family on a five-day cruise in the Caribbean. The total group was 32. They recently added a large family room, called "The Gathering Place," to accommodate the growing family.

The family also works to research family ancestry and the importance of preserving family heirlooms and memories. Recently, Judy created family history books for each child. "These included photos, clipping and stories I collected from my parents and Ron's parents," she explains.

Judy also knew it was important for her children to have exposure to other cultures. As part of that, the family hosted three foreign exchange students (from Spain, France, and the Philippines) while her children were in grade school and middle school.

In 2009, Judy and Ron asked their children to support a special interest in lieu of giving gifts. "For example, we have asked each family to donate time and/or money to a cause and then give a small report on that activity at Christmas," adds Judy.

Judy's record of activities is too extensive to list, but here are a few highlights. She has been involved for many years with the Bremer County Dairy Promoters, Bremer County Fair Queen Committee, Bremer County Farm Bureau, Bremer County Republicans, Bremer County 4-H and St. Matthews Church.

She is president of the Readlyn Community Club, is treasurer of the circle at their church (St. Matthews) and is on the Readlyn Historical Society Board. She has spent countless hours promoting dairy and beef throughout the county. "All of our daughters

were princesses or queens in beef and dairy organizations and the county fair," Judy states proudly.

"One of Judy's largest commitments was through 4-H," says Pastor Alfred Kruse, St. Matthews Lutheran Church. "One of her daughters even published a cookbook to raise money for the organization."

All six children were active in 4-H, and three were involved in FFA.

Judy and Ron love to travel and have been to Germany, Australia and Mexico and are planning a trip to Ireland this fall to celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary.

Carole Kleis - IMFH Class of 2009

Dubuque County

When Carole Kleis is not working on the farm, she is cooking, painting, quilting, reading or helping out in the community. She and her husband, Richard (Dick), operate 590 acres and milk 170 cows near Zwingle in Dubuque County. Son Steve farms with them and has taken over most of the milking chores, which allows Carole time to pursue her passions.

In addition to milking Holsteins for 48 years, this busy couple also raised five children. "The farm is the best place to raise children," declares Carole. "It teaches them responsibility." Carole still maintains the farm and tax records, although Dick pays the bills now. "I did it for 40 years, he can do it for the next 40," chuckles Carole. They received the Outstanding Dairy Farm Family Award in 1979.

Besides cooking, one of Carole's primary passions is sewing. She sewed the wedding dresses and attendants dresses for all four daughters. She also made the cummerbunds and ties for the guys, and (at the last wedding, she made the outfits for all the grandchildren (seven at that time, now 11).

"When we were in 4-H, my mother made us sew all our own projects," explains Carole. "We didn't always win blue ribbons, but we learned to sew." That talent paid off as she made many of her own kids' clothes when they were growing up.

Now, it seems whenever a neighbor needs a prom or wedding dress altered, they call Carole. "I don't make any money at it," she admits.

This effervescent seamstress is also into quilting. Last year she gave all the kids and grandkids a quilt at Christmas.

Carole has also become interested in wooden barn quilts, and she and a friend have made several.

Carole took painting lessons in the early 1990s as a hobby, and her home is decorated with a wide array of farm and outdoor scenes painted on a variety of materials.

One of the biggest activities now for Carole is upkeep and cleaning of a closed church the family bought so they could have Mass there three to four times a year. In 2001, the church was closed due to a shortage of priests. Assumption was a close-knit parish, many were lifetime members and their grandparents were original founders," explains Bernice Schuster, a longtime friend, "Everyone was devastated."

The plan was to sell the church, as two other churches had been sold. "Carole said at the time it would be a shame to turn the church into a machine shed; it just wouldn't be right," remembers Dick. The church was built in 1896.

"When the Assumption property was surveyed, it was discovered that the vestibule and back two rows of seats were on Kleis property," continues Schuster. The Kleis family entered a bid and it was accepted.

Since then Carole has arranged with a retired pastor to say Mass every three or four months, and the church community holds a potluck. "Thanks to Carole and others involved, this has really united the community," notes Schuster.

Doris Johnson - IMFH Class of 2009

Jefferson County

Her motto perfectly describes her busy life: "It is better to wear out than to rust out." Yet no matter how hectic her day might be, she always makes time for family and friends.

Doris Ringelspach Johnson of Fairfield in southeast Iowa was a farming partner with her husband, Don, for many years. About 20 years ago, a family farm corporation was established with Don, Doris, son Doug and daughter-in-law Lynne as stockholders. After Doug's untimely death in July 2007, and Don's passing in July 2008, many changes were made. Doris and her daughters, Dian Johnson and Dee Johnson Sandquist, continue to manage the 700 acres Doris owns.

While Don and Doug handled the daily farm work, Doris was the bookkeeper who kept detailed records. She worked closely with bank loan officers, who were impressed with her accounting skills, financial decisions and knowledge of agriculture.

Dian and Dee praised their mother for her leadership in the family farming operation and in community organizations. "The saying, 'Behind every successful man is a woman,' describes our Mother.

She is the woman behind two Iowa Master Farmers—our father, Donald, and our brother, Doug," says Dian.

Lynne says Doris is a major reason for the success of their farming operation. "She is one of the best-natured, friendly, mentally sharp, positive and enthusiastic people I've ever known. I've been blessed to have her in my life," she says.

Besides keeping farm records, Doris helped Don with the farming by driving tractors, herding cattle and providing daily meals, often delivered to the field. Doris wanted to be at home when the children came from school, so she raised laying chickens for extra income. For 10 years, her flock of 2,000 hens kept her busy raising and feeding chickens, along with gathering, washing, candling, boxing and selling eggs on contract.

After the children left for college, Doris worked at the Jefferson County assessor's office for 25 years, where she tallied the results of survey information collected from taxpayers on crop production, livestock statistics and farm equipment.

Besides her work on and off the farm, Doris volunteered as a 4-H leader and was a member of the county 4-H committee, president of the Jefferson County Republican Women, board member of the Iowa Federation of Republican Women, and member of the county Farm Bureau Women. She served on the Jefferson County Board for the Agency on Aging and was a delegate to the Silvered Hair Conference representing Iowa for the American Association of Retired Persons for two years.

Doris and Don supported each other's activities in community involvement. Don was active in several organizations at local, state and national levels. They shared an interest in travel. Don, Doris and the children often spent family vacations traveling to annual Soil and Water Conservation Association meetings.

Don and Doris traveled the U.S., Europe and China. They were on the first ag tour to China in the 1970s. They also hosted exchange students and held farm tours for visitors from foreign countries.

"Don and I often remarked about how thankful we were for the opportunities we had to travel. It widened our scope of understanding about agriculture and people," says Doris.

A lifelong member of First Lutheran Church in Fairfield, Master Profile Doris Johnson Spouse: Donald (deceased), married 65 years. Children: Dian, Dee and Doug (deceased) Interests: Family, church, travel, community service Doris had great-grandparents, Charles and Sarah Wendling Schmidt, who were founding members of the church in 1856. Doris has served in many ways including as a Sunday school teacher for 20 years. She's served on her local church council and with Lutheran women's organizations in which she has held offices at local, district and state L levels. She was an active member of the ecumenical Church Women United for 45 years.

Doris has lived her exceptional life dedicated to the creed: "My life is a gift from God; what I do with this life is my gift to God." Still active and involved in agriculture, she has given her family and her community the wonderful gift of her time and talents.

Marcella Schneckloth - IMFH Class of 2009

Scott County

Working every day with her husband, Ronald, on their livestock and crop farm north of Davenport, Marcella Schneckloth also crams in several hours or days a week of volunteer activities to help others learn about agriculture.

The Schneckloths feed about 75 head of beef cattle and collect eggs from about 500 laying hens, in addition to 160 acres of row crops and hay. They work side by side on their tidy farm and have never had a fight, says Marcella. "We may tease each other sometimes, but we never fight. I really enjoy working with my husband," she says.

They live and work on the farm Ron's parents purchased in 1940 and have raised their three children in the same big, comfortable farmhouse. All three children and grandchildren live close by and return to the farm often to visit and help out with the chores.

Marcella and Ron have carved out a small niche market that sustains their farming operation. They sell their eggs to several health food stores and grocery stores in the Davenport area and across the river in Illinois. They also have many customers who stop in at the farm to buy eggs. The Schneckloths offer "close to organic" eggs, says Ron.

"We don't use drugs or antibiotics in our chicken feed. We use our own grain and forages and grind and mix it ourselves. But we aren't entirely organic because we use fertilizer and pesticides as needed on our crops," he explains.

When the Schneckloths aren't doing chores, they're helping their community. They like to help others, especially urban dwellers in the Quad Cities, understand the role of agriculture and what farmers do on a daily basis. As one of the few farms left that raise laying hens, they have spent the past 30 years sharing their expertise about poultry. They have hosted many tours for schoolchildren and foreign visitors to give others a chance to learn about a diversified farming operation.

Every spring in April, Marcella and Ron donate eggs to nine different elementary schools so that third-graders can incubate eggs and watch chicks hatch. This year, they expanded the exhibit to the county fair, and it was a big hit with kids and their parents.

"We had a fantastic turnout at the exhibit. They listened to the chicks peep inside the eggshell. People stood and watched the chicks hatch out of their shells. They were delighted and fascinated," says Marcella.

Marcella and Ron are both active in multiple roles with Scott County Farm Bureau. Marcella has held most of the offices available to township women; she's currently president of Scott County Farm Bureau for 2009-10.

Since 1990, Marcella has co-chaired the Ag in the Classroom Committee. She works many hours with all the commodity groups to plan programs and teach children about agriculture in area schools. The program reaches about 700 to 800 schoolchildren each year.

Marcella works with youth in other innovative programs that teach agriculture. She is a judge for the Pizz-A-Thon contest program with Happy Joe's restaurant. She's also developed an Ag Trivia game for the county fair and works at the petting zoo at the East End Village in Bettendorf each August.

"When I'm volunteering, I meet so many nice people who are fun and interesting. It's rewarding to help people learn about agriculture," she says.

Marcella and Ron have been involved with 4-H and the Mississippi Valley Fair for many years. Although it's been a long time since their own children were in 4-H, Marcella and Ron continue to help other youngsters with 4-H projects. They are longtime supervisors of the fair's poultry department and grains department. The Schneckloths family still meets every summer at the fair to help Marcella and Ron with the grain exhibit.